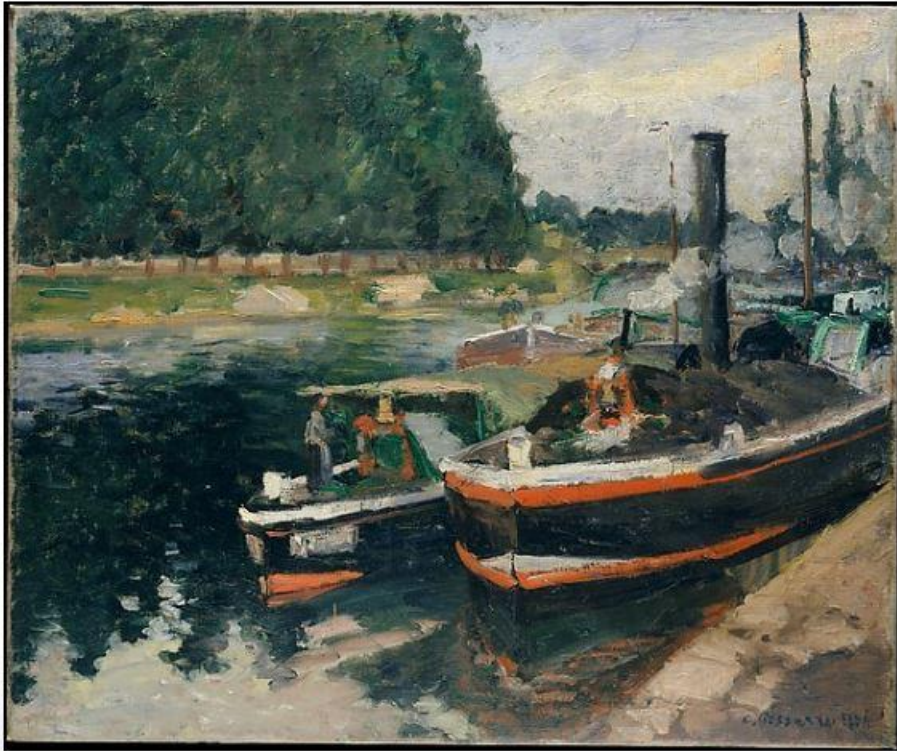


PD SHORT STORIES

NOVEMBER 2017



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A GENTLE GHOST, by Mary E. Wilkins

CLAY, by James Joyce

THE BEST SAUCE, by P. G. Wodehouse

THE APPARITION, by Guy de Maupassant

EMERALD, by A. Kuprin

THE SOUL OF LAPLOSHKA, by Saki

VIGNETTES FROM A LIFE OF TWO MONTHS, by Dorothy Canfield

THE COUNT AND THE WEDDING GUEST, by O. Henry

LEGEND OF THE NEWSPAPER, by Alice Ruth Moore

THE MARSEILLAISE, by Leonid Andreyev

THE FOSTER-CHILD OF THE DEER, by Frank Hamilton Cushing

A GENTLE GHOST

by Mary E. Wilkins

from the Internet Archive e-text of *A New England Nun And Other Stories*

OUT in front of the cemetery stood a white horse and a covered wagon. The horse was not tied, but she stood quite still, her four feet widely and ponderously planted, her meek white head hanging. Shadows of leaves danced on her back. There were many trees about the cemetery, and the foliage was unusually luxuriant for May. The four women who had come in the covered wagon remarked it. "I never saw the trees so forward as they are this year, seems to me," said one, gazing up at some magnificent gold-green branches over her head.

"I was sayin so to Mary this morning" rejoined another. "They re uncommon forward, I think."

They loitered along the narrow lanes between the lots four homely, middle-aged women, with decorous and subdued enjoyment in their worn faces. They read with peaceful curiosity and interest the inscriptions on the stones ; they turned aside to look at the tender, newly blossomed spring bushes the flowering almonds and the bridal wreaths. Once in a while they came to a new stone, which they immediately surrounded with eager criticism. There was a solemn hush when they reached a lot where some relatives of one of the party were buried. She put a bunch of flowers on a grave, then she stood looking at it with red eyes. The others grouped themselves deferentially aloof.

They did not meet any one in the cemetery until just before they left. When they had reached the rear and oldest portion of the yard, and were thinking of retracing their steps, they became suddenly aware of a child sitting in a lot at their right. The lot held seven old, leaning stones, dark and mossy, their inscriptions dimly traceable. The child sat close to one, and she looked up at the staring knot of women with a kind of innocent keenness, like a baby. Her face was small and fair and pinched. The women stood eying her.

"What's your name, little girl?" asked one. She had a bright flower in her bonnet and a smart lift to her chin, and seemed the natural spokeswoman of the party. Her name was Holmes. The child turned her head sideways

and murmured something.

"What? We can't hear. Speak up; don't be afraid!
What's your name?" The woman nodded the bright flower
over her, and spoke with sharp pleasantness.

"Nancy Wren," said the child, with a timid catch of her
breath.

"Wren?"

The child nodded. She kept her little pink, curving
mouth parted.

"It's nobody I know," remarked the questioner, reflectively. "I guess she comes from over there." She made a significant motion of her head towards the right. "Where do you live, Nancy?" she asked.

The child also motioned towards the right.

"I thought so," said the woman. "How old are you?"

"Ten."

The women exchanged glances. "Are you sure you're
telling the truth?"

The child nodded.

"I never saw a girl so small for her age if she is," said
one woman to another.

"Yes," said Mrs. Holmes, looking at her critically; "she
is dreadful small. She's considerable smaller than my
Mary was. Is there any of your folks buried in this lot?"
said she, fairly hovering with affability and determined graciousness.

The child's upturned face suddenly kindled. She began
speaking with a soft volubility that was an odd contrast to
her previous hesitation.

"That's mother," said she, pointing to one of the stones,
"and that's father, and there's John, and Margaret, and Mary,
and Susan, and the baby, and here's Jane."

The women stared at her in amazement. "Was it your "

began Mrs. Holmes ; but another woman stepped forward, stoutly impetuous

" Land ! it s the Blake lot !" said she. "This child can t be any relation to em. You hadn t ought to talk so, Nancy."

" It s so," said the child, shyly persistent. She evidently hardly grasped the force of the woman s remark.

They eyed her with increased bewilderment. " It can t be," said the woman to the others. " Every one of them Blakes died years ago."

" I ve seen Jane," volunteered the child, with a candid smile in their faces.

Then the stout woman sank down on her knees beside Jane s stone, and peered hard at it.

" She died forty year ago this May," said she, with a gasp.

" I used to know her when I was a child. She was ten years old when she died. You ain t ever seen her. You hadn t ought to tell such stories."

" I ain t seen her for a long time," said the little girl.

"What made you say you d seen her at all?" said Mrs. Holmes, sharply, thinking this was capitulation.

"I did use to see her a long time ago, an she used to wear a white dress, an a wreath on her head. She used to come here an play with me."

The women looked at each other with pale, shocked faces ; one nervous ; one shivered. " She ain t quite right," she whispered. " Let s go." The women began filing away. Mrs. Holmes, who came last, stood about for a part ing word to the child.

" You can t have seen her," said she, severely, " an you are a wicked girl to tell such stories. You mustn t do it again, remember."

Nancy stood with her hand on Jane s stone, looking at her. " She did," she repeated, with mild obstinacy.

"There's somethin' wrong about her, I guess," whispered Mrs. Holmes, rustling on after the others.

"I see she looked kind of queer the minute I set eyes on her," said the nervous woman.

When the four reached the front of the cemetery they sat down to rest for a few minutes. It was warm, and they had still quite a walk, nearly the whole width of the yard, to the other front corner where the horse and wagon were.

They sat down in a row on a bank ; the stout woman wiped her face ; Mrs. Holmes straightened her bonnet. Directly opposite across the street stood two houses, so close to each other that their walls almost touched. One was a large square building, glossily white, with green blinds ; the other was low, with a facing of whitewashed stone-work reaching to its lower windows, which somehow gave it a disgraced and menial air ; there were, moreover, no blinds.

At the side of the low building stretched a wide ploughed field, where several halting old figures were moving about planting. There was none of the brave hope of the sower about them. Even across the road one could see the feeble stiffness of their attitudes, the half-palsied fling of their arms.

"I declare I shouldn't think them old men over there would ever get that field planted," said Mrs. Holmes, energetically watchful. In the front door of the square white house sat a girl with bright hair. The yard was full of green light from two tall maple-trees, and the girl's hair made a brilliant spot of color in the midst of it.

"That's Flora Dunn over there on the door-step, ain't it ?" said the stout woman.

"Yes. I should think you could tell her by her red hair. 1

"I knew it. I should have thought Mr. Dunn would have hated to have had their house so near the poor-house. I declare I should !"

"Oh, he wouldn't mind," said Mrs. Holmes ; "he's as easy as old Tilly. It wouldn't have troubled him any if they'd set it right in his front yard. But I guess she minded some. I heard she did. John said there wa n't any need

of it. The town wouldn't have set it so near, if Mr. Dunri had set his foot down he wouldn't have it there. I s'pose they wanted to keep that big field on the side clear; out they would have moved it along a little if he'd made a fuss. I tell you what tis, I've bout made up[^]ny mind I dun know as it s' Scripture, but I can't help it if folks don't make a fuss they won't get their rights in this world. If you jest lay still an don't rise up, you're goin to get stepped on. If people like to be, they can ; I don't."

"I should have thought he'd have hated to have the poor-house quite so close," murmured the stout woman.

Suddenly Mrs. Holmes leaned forward and poked her head among the other three. She sat on the end of the row. "Say," said she, in a mysterious whisper, "I want to know if you've heard the stories bout the Dunn house?"

"No ; what ?" chorussed the other women, eagerly. They bent over towards her till the four faces were in a knot.

"Well," said Mrs. Holmes, cautiously, with a glance at the bright-headed girl across the way "I heard it pretty straight they say the house is haunted."

The stout woman sniffed and straightened herself.
"Haunted !" repeated she.

"They say that ever since Jenny died there's been queer noises round the house that they can't account for. You see that front chamber over there, the one next to the poor-house ; well, that's the room, they say."

The women all turned and looked at the chamber windows, where some ruffled white curtains were fluttering.

"That's the chamber where Jenny used to sleep, you know," Mrs. Holmes went on ; "an she died there. Well, they said that before Jenny died, Flora had always slept there with her, but she felt kind of bad about goin back there, so she thought she'd take another room. Well, there was the awfulest moanin an takin on up in Jenny's room, when she did, that Flora went back there to sleep."

"I shouldn't thought she could," whispered the nervous woman, who was quite pale.

"The moanin stopped jest as soon as she got in there

with a light. You see Jenny was always terrible timid and afraid to sleep alone, and had a lamp burnin all night, and it seemed to them jest as if it really was her, I s pose."

"I don t believe one word of it," said the stout woman, getting up. "It makes me all out of patience to hear people talk such stuff, jest because the Dunns happen to live opposite a graveyard."

"I told it jest as I heard it," said Mrs. Holmes, stiffly.

"Oh, I ain t blamin you ; it s the folks that start such stories that I ain t got any patience with. Think of that dear, pretty little sixteen-year-old girl hauntin a house !"

"Well, I ve told it jest as I heard it," repeated Mrs. Holmes, still in a tone of slight umbrage. "I don t ever take much stock in such things myself."

The four women strolled along to the covered wagon and climbed in. "I declare," said the stout woman, conciliatingly, "I dun know when I ve had such an outin . I feel as if it had done me good. I ve been wantin to come down to the cemetery for a long time, but it s most more n I want to walk. I feel real obliged to you, Mis Holmes."

The others climbed in. Mrs. Holmes disclaimed all obligations gracefully, established herself on the front seat, and shook the reins over the white horse. Then the party jogged along the road to the village, past outlying farm houses and rich green meadows, all freckled gold with dandelions. Dandelions were in their height ; the buttercups had not yet come.

Flora Dunn, the girl on the door-step, glanced up when they started down the street ; then she turned her eyes on her work ; she was sewing with nervous haste.

"Who were those folks, did you see, Flora ?" called her mother, out of the sitting-room.

"I didn t notice," replied Flora, absently.

Just then the girl whom the women had met came lingeringly out of the cemetery and crossed the street.

"There s that poor little Wren girl," remarked the voice in the sitting-room.

"Yes," assented Flora. After a while she got up and entered the house. Her mother looked anxiously at her when she came into the room.

"I'm all out of patience with you, Flora," said she. "You're just as white as a sheet. You'll make yourself sick. You're acting dreadfully foolish."

Flora sank into a chair and sat staring straight ahead with a strained, pitiful gaze. "I can't help it; I can't do any differently," said she. "I shouldn't think you'd scold me, mother."

"Scold you; I ain't scolding you, child; but there ain't any sense in your doing so. You'll make yourself sick, and you're all I've got left. I can't have anything happen to you, Flora." Suddenly Mrs. Dunn burst out in a low wail, hiding her face in her hands.

"I don't see as you're much better yourself, mother," said Flora, heavily.

"I don't know as I am," sobbed her mother; "but I've got you to worry about besides everything else. Oh, dear! oh, dear, dear!"

"I don't see any need of your worrying about me." Flora did not cry, but her face seemed to darken visibly with a gathering melancholy like a cloud. Her hair was beautiful, and she had a charming delicacy of complexion; but she was not handsome, her features were too sharp, her expression too intense and nervous. Her mother looked like her as to the expression; the features were widely different. It was as if both had passed through one corroding element which had given them the similarity of scars. Certainly a stranger would at once have noticed the strong resemblance between Mrs. Dunn's large, heavy-featured face and her daughter's thin, delicately outlined one, a resemblance which three months ago had not been perceptible.

"I see, if you don't," returned the mother. "I ain't blind."

"I don't see what you are blaming me for."

"I ain't blaming you, but it seems to me that you might just as well let me go up there and sleep as you."

Suddenly the girl also broke out into a wild cry. " I ain t going to leave her. Poor little Jenny ! poor little Jenny ! You needn t try to make me, mother j I won t !"

" Flora, don t !"

"I won t! I won t! I won t! Poor little Jenny! Oh, dear ! oh, dear !"

" What if it is so ? What if it is her ? Ain t she got me as well as you ? Can t her mother go to her ?"

" I won t leave her. I won t ! I won t !"

Suddenly Mrs. Dunn s calmness seemed to come uppermost, raised in the scale by the weighty impetus of the other s distress. " Flora," said she, with mournful solemnity, "you mustn t do so; it s wrong. You mustn t wear your self all out over something that maybe you ll find out wasn t so some time or other."

" Mother, don t you think it is don t you ?"

"I don t know what to think, Flora." Just then a door shut somewhere in the back part of the house. " There s father," said Mrs. Dunn, getting up; "an the fire ain t made."

Flora rose also, and went about helping her mother to get supper. Both suddenly settled into a rigidity of com*posure ; their eyes were red, but their lips were steady. There was a resolute vein in their characters ; they managed themselves with wrenches, and could be hard even with their grief. They got tea ready for Mr. Dunn and his two hired men ; then cleared it away, and sat down in the front room with their needlework. Mr. Dunn, a kindly, dull old man, was in there too, over his newspaper. Mrs. Dunn and Flora sewed intently, never taking their eyes from their work. Out in the next room stood a tall clock, which ticked loudly; just before it struck the hours it made always a curious grating noise. When it announced in this way the striking of nine, Mrs. Dunn and Flora exchanged glances ; the girl was pale, and her eyes looked larger. She began folding up her work. Suddenly a low moaning cry sounded through the house, seemingly from the room overhead. " There it is !" shrieked Flora. She caught up a lamp and ran. Mrs. Dunn was following, when her husband, sitting near the door, caught hold of her dress with a

bewildered air ; he had been dozing. "What s the matter?" said he, vaguely.

" Don t you hear it ? Didn t you hear it, father?"

The old man let go of her dress suddenly. " I didn t hear nothin ,"said he.

" Hark !"

But the cry, in fact, had ceased. Flora could be heard moving about in the room overhead, and that was all. In a moment Mrs. Dunn ran up-stairs after her. The old man sat staring. "It s all dum foolishness," he muttered, under his breath. Presently he fell to dozing again, and his vacantly smiling face lopped forward. Mr. Dunn, slow-brained, patient, and unimaginative, had had his evening naps interrupted after this manner for the last three months, and there was as yet no cessation of his bewilderment. He dealt with the simple, broad lights of life ; the shadows were beyond his speculation. For his consciousness his daughter Jenny had died and gone to heaven ; he was not capable of listening for her ghostly moans in her little chamber overhead, much less of hearing them with any credulity.

When his wife came down-stairs finally she looked at him, sleeping there, with a bitter feeling. She felt as if set about by an icy wind of loneliness. Her daughter, who was after her own kind, was all the one to whom she could look for sympathy and understanding in this subtle perplexity which had come upon her. And she would rather have dispensed with that sympathy, and heard alone those piteous, uncanny cries, for she was wild with anxiety about Flora. The girl had never been very strong. She looked at her distressfully when she came down the next morning.

" Did you sleep any last night ?" said she.

" Some," answered Flora.

Soon after breakfast they noticed the little Wren girl stealing across the road to the cemetery again. " She goes over there all the time," remarked Mrs. Dunn. "I b lieve she runs away. See her look behind her."

" Yes," said Flora, apathetically.

It was nearly noon when they heard a voice from the next house calling, " Nancy ! Nancy ! Nancy Wren !" The voice was loud and imperious, but slow and evenly modulated. It indicated well its owner. A woman who could regulate her own angry voice could regulate other people. Mrs. Dunn and Flora heard it understandingly.

" That poor little thing will catch it when she gets home," said Mrs. Dunn.

"Nancy! Nancy! Nancy Wren !" called the voice again.

"I pity the child if Mrs. Gregg has to go after her. Mebbe she s fell asleep over there. Flora, why don t you run over there an get her ?"

The voice rang out again. Flora got her hat and stole across the street a little below the house, so the calling woman should not see her. When she got into the cemetery she called in her turn, letting out her thin sweet voice cautiously. Finally she came directly upon the child. She was in the Blake lot, her little slender body, in its dingy cotton dress, curled up on the ground close to one of the graves. No one but Nature tended those old graves now, and she seemed to be lapsing them gently back to her own lines, at her own will. Of the garden shrubs which had been planted about them not one was left but an old low-spraying white rose-bush, which had just gotten its new leaves. The Blake lot was at the very rear of the yard, where it verged upon a light wood, which was silently stealing its way over its own proper boundaries. At the back of the lot stood a thicket of little thin trees, with silvery twinkling leaves. The ground was quite blue with houstonias.

The child raised her little fair head and stared at Flora, as if just awakened from sleep. She held her little pink mouth open, her innocent blue eyes had a surprised look, as if she were suddenly gazing upon a new scene.

"Where s she gone?" asked she, in her sweet, feeble pipe.

"Where s who gone?"

"Jane."

" I don t know what you mean. Come, Nancy, you must go home now."

"Didn't you see her?"

"I didn't see anybody," answered Flora, impatiently.
"Come!"

"She was right here."

"What do you mean?"

"Jane was standing right here. And she had her white dress on, and her wreath."

Flora shivered, and looked around her fearfully. The fancy of the child was overlapping her own nature.
"There wasn't a soul here. You've been dreaming, child. Come!"

"No, I wasn't. I've seen them blue flowers and the leaves wink in all the time. Jane stood right there." The child pointed with her tiny finger to a spot at her side.
"She hadn't come for a long time before," she added.
"She's stayed down there." She pointed at the grave nearest her.

"You mustn't talk so," said Flora, with tremulous severity.
"You must get right up and come home. Mrs. Gregg has been calling you and calling you. She won't like it."

Nancy turned quite pale around her little mouth, and sprang to her feet. "Is Miss Gregg coming?"

"She will come if you don't hurry."

The child said not another word. She flew along ahead through the narrow paths, and was in the almshouse door before Flora crossed the street.

"She's terrible afraid of Mrs. Gregg," she told her mother when she got home. Nancy had disturbed her own brooding a little, and she spoke more like herself.

"Poor little thing! I pity her," said Mrs. Dunn. Mrs. Dunn did not like Mrs. Gregg.

Flora rarely told a story until she had ruminated awhile over it herself. It was afternoon, and the two were in the front room at their sewing, before she told her mother about

"Jane."

"Of course she must have been dreaming," Flora said.

"She must have been," rejoined her mother.

But the two looked at each other, and their eyes said more than their tongues. Here was a new marvel, new evidence of a kind which they had heretofore scented at, these two rigidly walking New England souls ; yet walking, after all, upon narrow paths through dark meadows of mysticism. If they never lost their footing, the steaming damp of the meadows might come in their faces.

This fancy, delusion, superstition, whichever one might name it, of theirs had lasted now three months ever since young Jenny Dunn had died. There was apparently no reason why it should not last much longer, if delusion it were ; the temperaments of these two women, naturally nervous and imaginative, overwrought now by long care and sorrow, would perpetuate it.

If it were not delusion, pray what exorcism, what spell of book and bell, could lay the ghost of a little timid child who was afraid alone in the dark?

The days went on, and Flora still hurried up to her chamber at the stroke of nine. If she were a moment late, sometimes if she were not, that pitiful low wail sounded through the house.

The strange story spread gradually through the village. Mrs. Dunn and Flora were silent about it, but Gossip is her self of a ghostly nature, and minds not keys nor bars.,/

There was quite an excitement over it. People affected with morbid curiosity and sympathy came to the house. One afternoon the minister came and offered a prayer. Mrs. Dunn and Flora received them all with a certain reticence ; they did not concur in their wishes to remain and hear the mysterious noises for themselves. People called them "dreadful close." They got more satisfaction out of Mr. Dunn, who was perfectly ready to impart all the information in his power and his own theories in the matter.

"I never heard a thing but once," said he, "and then it sounded more like a cat to me than anything. I guess mother and Flora are kinder nervous."

The spring was waxing late when Flora went up-stairs one night with the oil low in her lamp. She had neglected filling it that day. She did not notice it until she was undressed ; then she thought to herself that she must blow it out. She always kept a lamp burning all night, as she had in timid little Jenny's day. Flora herself was timid now.

So she blew the light out. She had barely laid her head upon the pillow when the low moaning wail sounded through the room. Flora sat up in bed and listened, her hands clinched. The moan gathered strength and volume ; little broken words and sentences, the piteous ejaculations of terror and distress, began to shape themselves out of it.

Flora sprang out of bed, and stumbled towards her west window the one on the almshouse side. She leaned her head out, listening a moment. Then she called her mother with wild vehemence. But her mother was already at the door with a lamp. When she entered, the moans ceased.

" Mother," shrieked Flora, " it ain't Jenny. It's some body over there at the poor-house. Put the lamp out in the entry, and come back here and listen."

Mrs. Dunn set out the lamp and came back, closing the door. It was a few minutes first, but presently the cries recommenced.

"I'm goin right over there," said Mrs. Dunn. "I'm goin to dress myself an go over there. I'm goin to have this affair sifted now."

" I'm going too," said Flora.

It was only half-past nine when the two stole into the almshouse yard. The light was not out in the room on the ground-floor, which the overseer's family used for a sitting-room. When they entered, the overseer was there asleep in his chair, his wife sewing at the table, and an old woman in a pink cotton dress, apparently doing nothing. They all started, and stared at the intruders.

"Good-evenin'," said Mrs. Dunn, trying to speak composedly. " We thought we'd come in ; we got kind of started. Oh, there tis now ! What is it, Mis Gregg ?"

In fact, at that moment, the wail, louder and more dis

tinct, was heard.

"Why, it s Nancy," replied Mrs. Gregg, with dignified surprise. She was a large woman, with a masterly placidity about her. " I heard her a few minutes ago," she went on ; " an I was goin up there to see to her if she hadn t stopped."

Mr. Gregg, a heavy, saturnine old man, with a broad bristling face, sat staring stupidly. The old woman in pink calico surveyed them all with an impersonal grin.

"Nancy!" repeated Mrs. Dunn, looking at Mrs. Gregg. She had not fancied this woman very much, and the two had not fraternized, although they were such near neighbors. Indeed, Mrs. Gregg was not of a sociable nature, and associated very little with anything but her own duties.

"Yes; Nancy Wren," she said, with gathering amazement. " She cries out this way most every night. She s ten years old, but she s as afraid of the dark as a baby. She s a queer child. I guess mebbe she s nervous. I don t know but she s got notions into her head, stayin over in the graveyard so much. She runs away over there every chance she can get, an she goes over a queer rigmarole about playin with Jane, and her bein dressed in white an a wreath. I found out she meant Jane Blake, that s buried in the Blake lot. I knew there wa n t any children round here, an* I thought I d look into it. You know it says Our Father, an Our Mother, on the old folks stones. An there she was, callin them father an mother. You d thought they was right there. I ve got most out o patience with the child. I don t know nothin about such kind of folks." The wail continued. " I ll go right up there," said Mrs. Gregg, determinately, taking a lamp.

Mrs. Dunn and Flora followed. When they entered the chamber to which she led them they saw little Nancy sitting up in bed, her face pale and convulsed, her blue eyes streaming with tears, her little pink mouth quivering.

"Nancy " began Mrs. Gregg, in a weighty tone. But Mrs. Dunn sprang forward and threw her arms around the child.

" You got frightened, didn t you ?" whispered she ; and Nancy clung to her as if for life.

A great wave of joyful tenderness rolled up in the heart of the bereaved woman. It was not, after all, the lonely and fearfully wandering little spirit of her dear Jenny ; she was peaceful and blessed, beyond all her girlish tumults and terrors; but it was this little living girl. She saw it all plainly now. Afterwards it seemed to her that any one but a woman with her nerves strained, and her imagination unhealthily keen through watching and sorrow, would have seen it before.

She held Nancy tight, and soothed her. She felt almost as if she held her own Jenny. " I guess I ll take her home with me, if you don t care," she said to Mrs. Gregg.

"Why, I don t know as I ve got any objections, if you want to," answered Mrs. Gregg, with cold stateliness. " Nancy Wren has had everything done for her that I was able to do," she added, when Mrs. Dunn had wrapped up the child, and they were all on the stairs. " I ain t coaxed an cuddled her, because it ain t my way. I never did with my own children."

"Oh, I know you ve done all you could," said Mrs. Dunn, with abstracted apology. " I jest thought I d like to take her home to-night. Don t you think I m blamin you, Mis Gregg." She bent down and kissed the little tearful face on her shoulder : she was carrying Nancy like a baby. Flora had hold of one of her little dangling hands.

"You shall go right up -stairs an sleep with Flora," Mrs. Dunn whispered in the child s ear, when they were going across the yard ; " an you shall have the lamp burnin all night, an I ll give you a piece of cake before you go."

It was the custom of the Dunns to visit the cemetery and carry flowers to Jenny s grave every Sunday afternoon. Next Sunday little Nancy went with them. She followed happily along, and did not seem to think of the Blake lot. That pitiful fancy, if fancy it were, which had peopled her empty childish world with ghostly kindred, which had led into it an angel playmate in white robe and crown, might lie at rest now. There was no more need for it. She had \ found her place in a nest of living hearts, and she was getting her natural food of human love.

They had dressed Nancy in one of the little white frocks which Jenny had worn in her childhood, and her hat was trimmed with some ribbon and rose-buds which had adorned

one of the dead young girl s years before.

It was a beautiful Sunday. After they left the cemetery they strolled a little way down the road. The road lay between deep green meadows and cottage yards. It was not quite time for the roses, and the lilacs were turning gray. The buttercups in the meadows had blossomed out, but the dandelions had lost their yellow crowns, and their filmy skulls appeared. They stood like ghosts among crowds of golden buttercups ; but none of the family thought of that; their ghosts were laid in peace.



CLAY

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Dubliners*, by James Joyce

THE matron had given her leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over and Maria looked forward to her evening out. The kitchen was spick and span: the cook said you could see yourself in the big copper boilers. The fire was nice and bright and on one of the side-tables were four very big barmbracks. These barmbracks seemed uncut; but if you went closer you would see that they had been cut into long thick even slices and were ready to be handed round at tea. Maria had cut them herself.

Maria was a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin. She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: "Yes, my dear," and "No, my dear." She was always sent for when the women quarrelled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. One day the matron had said to her:

"Maria, you are a veritable peace-maker!"

And the sub-matron and two of the Board ladies had heard the compliment. And Ginger Mooney was always saying what she wouldn't do to the dummy who had charge of the irons if it wasn't for Maria. Everyone was so fond of Maria.

The women would have their tea at six o'clock and she would be able to get away before seven. From Ballsbridge to the Pillar, twenty minutes; from the Pillar to Drumcondra, twenty minutes; and twenty minutes to buy the things. She would be there before eight. She took out her purse with

the silver clasps and read again the words A Present from Belfast. She was very fond of that purse because Joe had brought it to her five years before when he and Alphy had gone to Belfast on a Whit-Monday trip. In the purse were two half-crowns and some coppers. She would have five shillings clear after paying tram fare. What a nice evening they would have, all the children singing! Only she hoped that Joe wouldn't come in drunk. He was so different when he took any drink.

Often he had wanted her to go and live with them; but she would have felt herself in the way (though Joe's wife was ever so nice with her) and she had become accustomed to the life of the laundry. Joe was a good fellow. She had nursed him and Alphy too; and Joe used often say:

"Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother."

After the break-up at home the boys had got her that position in the Dublin by Lamplight laundry, and she liked it. She used to have such a bad opinion of Protestants but now she thought they were very nice people, a little quiet and serious, but still very nice people to live with. Then she had her plants in the conservatory and she liked looking after them. She had lovely ferns and wax-plants and, whenever anyone came to visit her, she always gave the visitor one or two slips from her conservatory. There was one thing she didn't like and that was the tracts on the walks; but the matron was such a nice person to deal with, so genteel.

When the cook told her everything was ready she went into the women's room and began to pull the big bell. In a few minutes the women began to come in by twos and threes, wiping their steaming hands in their petticoats and pulling down the sleeves of their blouses over their red steaming arms. They settled down before their huge mugs which the cook and the dummy filled up with hot tea, already mixed with milk and sugar in huge tin cans. Maria superintended the distribution of the barmbrack and saw that every woman got her four slices. There was a great deal of laughing and joking during the meal. Lizzie Fleming said Maria was sure to get the ring and, though Fleming had said that for so many Hallow Eves, Maria had to laugh and say she didn't want any ring or man either; and when she laughed her grey-green eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness and the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin. Then Ginger Mooney lifted her mug of tea and proposed Maria's health while all the other women clattered with their mugs on the table, and said she was sorry she hadn't a sup of porter to drink it in. And Maria laughed again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin and till her minute body nearly shook itself asunder because she knew that Mooney meant well though, of course, she had the notions of a common woman.

But wasn't Maria glad when the women had finished their tea and the cook and the dummy had begun to clear away the tea-things! She went into

her little bedroom and, remembering that the next morning was a mass morning, changed the hand of the alarm from seven to six. Then she took off her working skirt and her house-boots and laid her best skirt out on the bed and her tiny dress-boots beside the foot of the bed. She changed her blouse too and, as she stood before the mirror, she thought of how she used to dress for mass on Sunday morning when she was a young girl; and she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body.

When she got outside the streets were shining with rain and she was glad of her old brown waterproof. The tram was full and she had to sit on the little stool at the end of the car, facing all the people, with her toes barely touching the floor. She arranged in her mind all she was going to do and thought how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket. She hoped they would have a nice evening. She was sure they would but she could not help thinking what a pity it was Alphy and Joe were not speaking. They were always falling out now but when they were boys together they used to be the best of friends: but such was life.

She got out of her tram at the Pillar and ferreted her way quickly among the crowds. She went into Downes's cake-shop but the shop was so full of people that it was a long time before she could get herself attended to. She bought a dozen of mixed penny cakes, and at last came out of the shop laden with a big bag. Then she thought what else would she buy: she wanted to buy something really nice. They would be sure to have plenty of apples and nuts. It was hard to know what to buy and all she could think of was cake. She decided to buy some plumcake but Downes's plumcake had not enough almond icing on top of it so she went over to a shop in Henry Street. Here she was a long time in suiting herself and the stylish young lady behind the counter, who was evidently a little annoyed by her, asked her was it wedding-cake she wanted to buy. That made Maria blush and smile at the young lady; but the young lady took it all very seriously and finally cut a thick slice of plumcake, parcelled it up and said:

"Two-and-four, please."

She thought she would have to stand in the Drumcondra tram because none of the young men seemed to notice her but an elderly gentleman made room for her. He was a stout gentleman and he wore a brown hard hat; he had a square red face and a greyish moustache. Maria thought he was a colonel-looking gentleman and she reflected how much more polite he was than the young men who simply stared straight before them. The gentleman began to chat with her about Hallow Eve and the rainy weather. He supposed the bag was full of good things for the little ones and said it was only right that the youngsters should enjoy themselves while they

were young. Maria agreed with him and favoured him with demure nods and hems. He was very nice with her, and when she was getting out at the Canal Bridge she thanked him and bowed, and he bowed to her and raised his hat and smiled agreeably, and while she was going up along the terrace, bending her tiny head under the rain, she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken.

Everybody said: "O, here's Maria!" when she came to Joe's house. Joe was there, having come home from business, and all the children had their Sunday dresses on. There were two big girls in from next door and games were going on. Maria gave the bag of cakes to the eldest boy, Alphy, to divide and Mrs. Donnelly said it was too good of her to bring such a big bag of cakes and made all the children say:

"Thanks, Maria."

But Maria said she had brought something special for papa and mamma, something they would be sure to like, and she began to look for her plumcake. She tried in Downes's bag and then in the pockets of her waterproof and then on the hallstand but nowhere could she find it. Then she asked all the children had any of them eaten it--by mistake, of course--but the children all said no and looked as if they did not like to eat cakes if they were to be accused of stealing. Everybody had a solution for the mystery and Mrs. Donnelly said it was plain that Maria had left it behind her in the tram. Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment. At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and fourpence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright.

But Joe said it didn't matter and made her sit down by the fire. He was very nice with her. He told her all that went on in his office, repeating for her a smart answer which he had made to the manager. Maria did not understand why Joe laughed so much over the answer he had made but she said that the manager must have been a very overbearing person to deal with. Joe said he wasn't so bad when you knew how to take him, that he was a decent sort so long as you didn't rub him the wrong way. Mrs. Donnelly played the piano for the children and they danced and sang. Then the two next-door girls handed round the nuts. Nobody could find the nutcrackers and Joe was nearly getting cross over it and asked how did they expect Maria to crack nuts without a nutcracker. But Maria said she didn't like nuts and that they weren't to bother about her. Then Joe asked would she take a bottle of stout and Mrs. Donnelly said there was port wine too in the house if she would prefer that. Maria said she would rather they didn't ask her to take anything: but Joe insisted.

So Maria let him have his way and they sat by the fire talking over old

times and Maria thought she would put in a good word for Alphy. But Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if ever he spoke a word to his brother again and Maria said she was sorry she had mentioned the matter. Mrs. Donnelly told her husband it was a great shame for him to speak that way of his own flesh and blood but Joe said that Alphy was no brother of his and there was nearly being a row on the head of it. But Joe said he would not lose his temper on account of the night it was and asked his wife to open some more stout. The two next-door girls had arranged some Hallow Eve games and soon everything was merry again. Maria was delighted to see the children so merry and Joe and his wife in such good spirits. The next-door girls put some saucers on the table and then led the children up to the table, blindfold. One got the prayer-book and the other three got the water; and when one of the next-door girls got the ring Mrs. Donnelly shook her finger at the blushing girl as much as to say: O, I know all about it! They insisted then on blindfolding Maria and leading her up to the table to see what she would get; and, while they were putting on the bandage, Maria laughed and laughed again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin.

They led her up to the table amid laughing and joking and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do. She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs. Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayer-book.

After that Mrs. Donnelly played Miss McCloud's Reel for the children and Joe made Maria take a glass of wine. Soon they were all quite merry again and Mrs. Donnelly said Maria would enter a convent before the year was out because she had got the prayer-book. Maria had never seen Joe so nice to her as he was that night, so full of pleasant talk and reminiscences. She said they were all very good to her.

At last the children grew tired and sleepy and Joe asked Maria would she not sing some little song before she went, one of the old songs. Mrs. Donnelly said "Do, please, Maria!" and so Maria had to get up and stand beside the piano. Mrs. Donnelly bade the children be quiet and listen to Maria's song. Then she played the prelude and said "Now, Maria!" and Maria, blushing very much began to sing in a tiny quavering voice. She sang I Dreamt that I Dwelt, and when she came to the second verse she sang again:

I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
With vassals and serfs at my side,
And of all who assembled within those walls
That I was the hope and the pride.

I had riches too great to count; could boast
Of a high ancestral name,
But I also dreamt, which pleased me most,
That you loved me still the same.

But no one tried to show her her mistake; and when she had ended her song Joe was very much moved. He said that there was no time like the long ago and no music for him like poor old Balfe, whatever other people might say; and his eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was.



THE BEST SAUCE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Death At The Excelsior*, by P. G. Wodehouse

Eve Hendrie sat up in bed. For two hours she had been trying to get to sleep, but without success. Never in her life had she felt more wakeful.

There were two reasons for this. Her mind was disturbed, and she was very hungry. Neither sensation was novel to her. Since first she had become paid companion to Mrs. Rastall-Retford there had hardly been a moment when she had not been hungry. Some time before Mrs. Rastall-Retford's doctor had recommended to that lady a Spartan diet, and in this Eve, as companion, had unwillingly to share. It was not pleasant for either of them, but at least Mrs. Rastall-Retford had the knowledge that she had earned it by years of honest self-indulgence. Eve had not that consolation.

Meagre fare, moreover, had the effect of accentuating Mrs. Rastall-Retford's always rather pronounced irritability. She was a massive lady, with a prominent forehead, some half-dozen chins, and a manner towards those in her employment which would have been resented in a second mate by the crew of a Western ocean tramp. Even at her best

she was no ray of sunshine about the house. And since the beginning of the self-denying ordinance she had been at her worst.

But it was not depression induced by her employer that was disturbing Eve. That was a permanent evil. What was agitating her so extremely to-night was the unexpected arrival of Peter Rayner.

It was Eve's practice to tell herself several times a day that she had no sentiment for Peter Rayner but dislike. She did not attempt to defend her attitude logically, but nevertheless she clung to it, and to-night, when he entered the drawing-room, she had endeavoured to convey by her manner that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she remembered him at all, and that, having accomplished that feat, she now intended to forget him again immediately. And he had grinned a cheerful, affectionate grin, and beamed on her without a break till bedtime.

Before coming as companion to Mrs. Rastall-Retford Eve had been governess to Hildebrand, aged six, the son of a Mrs. Elphinstone. It had been, on the whole, a comfortable situation. She had not liked Mrs. Elphinstone, but Hildebrand had been docile, and altogether life was quite smooth and pleasant until Mrs. Elphinstone's brother came for a visit. Peter Rayner was that brother.

There is a type of man who makes love with the secrecy and sheepish reserve of a cowboy shooting up a Wild West saloon. To this class Peter belonged. He fell in love with Eve at sight, and if, at the end of the first day, there was anyone in the house who was not aware of it, it was only Hildebrand, aged six. And even Hildebrand must have had his suspicions.

Mrs. Elphinstone was among the first to become aware of it. For two days, frostily silent and gimlet-like as to the eye, she observed Peter's hurricane wooing from afar; then she acted. Peter she sent to London, pacifying him with an invitation to return to the house in the following week. This done, she proceeded to eliminate Eve. In the course of the parting interview she expressed herself perhaps a little less guardedly than was either just or considerate; and Eve, flushed and at war with the whole race of Rayners, departed that afternoon to seek a situation elsewhere. She had found it at the house of Mrs. Rastall-Retford.

And now this evening, as she sat in the drawing-room playing the piano to her employer, in had walked the latter's son, a tall, nervous young man, perpetually clearing his throat and fiddling with a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, with the announcement that he had brought his friend, Mr. Rayner, to spend a few days in the old home.

Eve could still see the look on Peter's face as, having shaken hands with his hostess, he turned to her. It was the look of the cowboy who, his weary ride over, sees through the dusk the friendly gleam of the saloon windows, and with a happy sigh reaches for his revolver. There could be no two meanings to that look. It said, as clearly as if he had shouted it, that this was no accidental meeting; that he had tracked her down and proposed to resume matters at the point where they had left off.

Eve was indignant. It was abominable that he should pursue her in this way. She sat thinking how abominable it was for five minutes; and then it suddenly struck her that she was hungrier than ever. She had forgotten her material troubles for the moment. It seemed to her now that she was quite faint with hunger.

A cuckoo clock outside the door struck one. And, as it did so, it came to Eve that on the sideboard in the dining-room there were biscuits.

A moment later she was creeping softly down the stairs.

* * * * *

It was dark and ghostly on the stairs. The house was full of noises. She was glad when she reached the dining-room. It would be pleasant to switch on the light. She pushed open the door, and uttered a cry. The light was already switched on, and at the table, his back to her, was a man.

There was no time for flight. He must have heard the door open. In another moment he would turn and spring.

She spoke tremulously.

"Don't--don't move. I'm pointing a pistol at you."

The man did not move.

"Foolish child!" he said, indulgently. "Suppose it went off!"

She uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You! What are you doing here, Mr. Rayner?"

She moved into the room, and her relief changed swiftly into indignation. On the table were half a chicken, a loaf, some cold potatoes, and a bottle of beer.

"I'm eating, thank goodness!" said Peter, helping himself to a cold

potato. "I had begun to think I never should again."

"Eating!"

"Eating. I know a man of sensibility and refinement ought to shrink from raiding his hostess's larder in the small hours, but hunger's death to the finer feelings. It's the solar plexus punch which puts one's better self down and out for the count of ten. I am a large and healthy young man, and, believe me, I need this little snack. I need it badly. May I cut you a slice of chicken?"

She could hardly bear to look at it, but pride gave her strength.

"No," she snapped.

"You're sure? Poor little thing; I know you're half starved."

Eve stamped.

"How dare you speak to me like that, Mr. Rayner?"

He drank bottled beer thoughtfully.

"What made you come down? I suppose you heard a noise and thought it was burglars?" he said.

"Yes," said Eve, thankfully accepting the idea. At all costs she must conceal the biscuit motive.

"That was very plucky of you. Won't you sit down?"

"No, I'm going back to bed."

"Not just yet. I've several things to talk to you about. Sit down. That's right. Now cover up your poor little pink ankles, or you'll be catching----"

She started up.

"Mr. Rayner!"

"Sit down."

She looked at him defiantly, then, wondering at herself for doing it, sat down.

"Now," said Peter, "what do you mean by it? What do you mean by dashing off from my sister's house without leaving a word for me as to where

you were going? You knew I loved you."

"Good night, Mr. Rayner."

"Sit down. You've given me a great deal of trouble. Do you know it cost me a sovereign in tips to find out your address? I couldn't get it out of my sister, and I had to apply to the butler. I've a good mind to knock it off your first week's pin-money."

"I shall not stay here listening----"

"You knew perfectly well I wanted to marry you. But you fly off without a word and bury yourself in this benighted place with a gorgon who nags and bullies you----"

"A nice way to speak of your hostess," said Eve, scornfully.

"A very soothing way. I don't think I ever took such a dislike to a woman at first sight before. And when she started to bullyrag you, it was all I could do--But it won't last long now. You must come away at once. We'll be married after Christmas, and in the meantime you can go and live with my sister----"

Eve listened speechlessly. She had so much to say that the difficulty of selection rendered her dumb.

"When can you start? I mean, do you have to give a month's notice or anything?"

Eve got up with a short laugh.

"Good night, Mr. Rayner," she said. "You have been very amusing, but I am getting tired."

"I'm glad it's all settled," said Peter. "Good night."

Eve stopped. She could not go tamely away without saying a single one of the things that crowded in her mind.

"Do you imagine," she said, "that I intend to marry you? Do you suppose, for one moment----"

"Rather!" said Peter. "You shall have a splendid time from now on, to make up for all you've gone through. I'm going to be awfully good to you, Eve. You sha'n't ever have any more worries, poor old thing." He looked at her affectionately. "I wonder why it is that large men always fall in love with little women. There are you, a fragile, fairy-like, ethereal wisp of a little creature; and here am I----"

"A great, big, greedy pig!" burst out Eve, "who thinks about nothing but eating and drinking."

"I wasn't going to have put it quite like that," said Peter, thoughtfully.

"I hate a greedy man," said Eve, between her teeth.

"I have a healthy appetite," protested Peter. "Nothing more. It runs in the family. At the time of the Civil War the Rayner of the period, who was King Charles's right-hand man, would frequently eat despatches to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. He was noted for it."

Eve reached the door and turned.

"I despise you," she said.

"Good night," said Peter, tenderly. "To-morrow morning we'll go for a walk."

His prediction proved absolutely correct. He was smoking a cigarette after breakfast when Eve came to him. Her face was pink and mutinous, but there was a gleam in her eye.

"Are you ready to come out, Mr. Rayner?" she said. "Mrs. Rastall-Retford says I'm to take you to see the view from the golf links."

"You'll like that," said Peter.

"I shall not like it," snapped Eve. "But Mrs. Rastall-Retford is paying me a salary to do what she tells me, and I have to earn it."

Conversation during the walk consisted mainly of a monologue on the part of Peter. It was a crisp and exhilarating morning, and he appeared to be feeling a universal benevolence towards all created things. He even softened slightly on the subject of Mrs. Rastall-Retford, and advanced the theory that her peculiar manner might be due to her having been ill-treated as a child.

Eve listened in silence. It was not till they were nearing home on their return journey that she spoke.

"Mr. Rayner," she said.

"Yes?" said Peter.

"I was talking to Mrs. Rastall-Retford after breakfast," said Eve, "and I told her something about you."

"My conscience is clear."

"Oh, nothing bad. Some people would say it was very much to your credit." She looked away across the fields. "I told her you were a vegetarian," she added, carelessly.

There was a long silence. Then Peter spoke three words, straight from the heart.

"You little devil!"

Eve turned and looked at him, her eyes sparkling wickedly.

"You see!" she said. "Now perhaps you will go."

"Without you?" said Peter, stoutly. "Never!"

"In London you will be able to eat all day--anything you like. You will be able to creep about your club gnawing cold chicken all night. But if you stay here----"

"You have got a wrong idea of the London clubman's life," said Peter. "If I crept about my club gnawing cold chicken I should have the committee after me. No, I shall stay here and look after you. After all, what is food?"

"I'll tell you what yours will be, if you like. Or would you rather wait and let it be a surprise? Well, for lunch you will have some boiled potatoes and cabbage and a sweet--a sort of light _soufflé_ thing. And for dinner----"

"Yes, but one moment," said Peter. "If I'm a vegetarian, how did you account for my taking all the chicken I could get at dinner last night, and looking as if I wanted more?"

"Oh, that was your considerateness. You didn't want to give trouble, even if you had to sacrifice your principles. But it's all right now. You are going to have your vegetables."

Peter drew a deep breath--the breath of the man who braces himself up and thanks whatever gods there be for his unconquerable soul.

"I don't care," he said. "'A book of verses underneath the bough, a jug of wine, and thou----'"

"Oh, and I forgot," interrupted Eve. "I told her you were a teetotaller as well."

There was another silence, longer than the first.

"The best train," said Eve, at last, "is the ten-fifty."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"The best train?"

"For London."

"What makes you think that I am interested in trains to London?"

Eve bit her lip.

"Mr. Rayner," she said, after a pause, "do you remember at lunch one day at Mrs. Elphinstone's refusing parsnips? You said that, so far as you were concerned, parsnips were first by a mile, and that prussic acid and strychnine also ran."

"Well?" said Peter.

"Oh, nothing," said Eve. "Only I made a stupid mistake. I told the cook you were devoted to parsnips. I'm sorry."

Peter looked at her gravely. "I'm putting up with a lot for your sake," he said.

"You needn't. Why don't you go away?"

"And leave you chained to the rock, Andromeda? Not for Perseus! I've only been here one night, but I've seen enough to know that I've got to take you away from this place. Honestly, it's killing you. I was watching you last night. You're scared if that infernal old woman starts to open her mouth. She's crushing the life out of you. I'm going to stay on here till you say you'll marry me, or till they throw me out."

"There are parsnips for dinner to-night," said Eve, softly.

"I shall get to like them. They are an acquired taste, I expect. Perhaps I am, too. Perhaps I am the human parsnip, and you will have to learn to love me."

"You are the human burr," said Eve, shortly. "I shouldn't have thought it possible for a man to behave as you are doing."

* * * * *

In spite of herself, there were moments during the next few days when Eve felt twinges of remorse. It was only by telling herself that he had no right to have followed her to this house, and that he was at perfect liberty to leave whenever he wished, that she could harden her heart again. And even this reflection was not entirely satisfactory, for it made her feel how fond he must be of her to endure these evils for her sake.

And there was no doubt about there being evils. It was a dreary house in which to spend winter days. There were no books that one could possibly read. The nearest railway station was five miles away. There was not even a dog to talk to. Generally it rained. Though Eve saw little of Peter, except at meals and in the drawing-room after dinner--for Mrs. Rastall-Retford spent most of the day in her own sitting-room and required Eve to be at her side--she could picture his sufferings, and, try as she would, she could not keep herself from softening a little. Her pride was weakening. Constant attendance on her employer was beginning to have a bad effect on her nerves. Association in a subordinate capacity with Mrs. Rastall-Retford did not encourage a proud and spirited outlook on life.

Her imagination had not exaggerated Peter's sufferings. Many people consider that Dante has spoken the last word on the post-mortem housing of the criminal classes. Peter, after the first week of his visit, could have given him a few new ideas.

* * * * *

It is unpleasant to be half starved. It is unpleasant to be cooped up in a country-house in winter with nothing to do. It is unpleasant to have to sit at meals and listen to the only girl you have ever really loved being bullyragged by an old lady with six chins. And all these unpleasantnesses were occurring to Peter simultaneously. It is highly creditable to him that the last should completely have outweighed the others.

He was generally alone. Mr. Rastall-Retford, who would have been better than nothing as a companion, was a man who enjoyed solitude. He was a confirmed vanisher. He would be present at one moment, the next he would have glided silently away. And, even on the rare occasions when he decided not to vanish, he seldom did much more than clear his throat nervously and juggle with his pince-nez.

Peter, in his boyhood, had been thrilled once by a narrative of a man who got stuck in the Sargasso Sea. It seemed to him now that the

monotony of the Sargasso Sea had been greatly exaggerated.

Nemesis was certainly giving Peter his due. He had wormed his way into the Rastall-Retford home-circle by grossly deceitful means. The moment he heard that Eve had gone to live with Mrs. Rastall-Retford, and had ascertained that the Rastall-Retford with whom he had been at Cambridge and whom he still met occasionally at his club when he did not see him first, was this lady's son, he had set himself to court young Mr. Rastall-Retford. He had cornered him at the club and begun to talk about the dear old 'Varsity days, ignoring the embarrassment of the latter, whose only clear recollection of the dear old 'Varsity days as linking Peter and himself was of a certain bump-supper night, when sundry of the festive, led and inspired by Peter, had completely wrecked his rooms and shaved off half a growing moustache. He conveyed to young Mr. Rastall-Retford the impression that, in the dear old 'Varsity days, they had shared each other's joys and sorrows, and, generally, had made Damon and Pythias look like a pair of cross-talk knockabouts at one of the rowdier music-halls. Not to invite so old a friend to stay at his home, if he ever happened to be down that way, would, he hinted, be grossly churlish. Mr. Rastall-Retford, impressed, issued the invitation. And now Peter was being punished for his deceit. Nemesis may not be an Alfred Shrubb, but give her time and she gets there.

* * * * *

It was towards the middle of the second week of his visit that Eve, coming into the drawing-room before dinner, found Peter standing in front of the fire. They had not been alone together for several days.

"Well?" said he.

Eve went to the fire and warmed her hands.

"Well?" she said, dispiritedly.

She was feeling nervous and ill. Mrs. Rastall-Retford had been in one of her more truculent moods all day, and for the first time Eve had the sensation of being thoroughly beaten. She dreaded the long hours to bedtime. The thought that there might be bridge after dinner made her feel physically ill. She felt she could not struggle through a bridge night.

On the occasions when she was in one of her dangerous moods, Mrs. Rastall-Retford sometimes chose rest as a cure, sometimes relaxation. Rest meant that she retired to her room immediately after dinner, and expended her venom on her maid; relaxation meant bridge, and bridge seemed to bring out all her worst points. They played the game for

counters at her house, and there had been occasions in Eve's experience when the loss of a hundred or so of these useful little adjuncts to Fun in the Home had lashed her almost into a frenzy. She was one of those bridge players who keep up a running quarrel with Fate during the game, and when she was not abusing Fate she was generally reproaching her partner. Eve was always her partner; and to-night she devoutly hoped that her employer would elect to rest. She always played badly with Mrs. Rastall-Retford, through sheer nervousness. Once she had revoked, and there had been a terrible moment and much subsequent recrimination.

Peter looked at her curiously.

"You're pale to-night," he said.

"I have a headache."

"H'm! How is our hostess? Fair? Or stormy?"

"As I was passing her door I heard her bullying her maid, so I suppose stormy."

"That means a bad time for you?" he said, sympathetically.

"I suppose so. If we play bridge. But she may go to bed directly after dinner."

She tried to keep her voice level, but he detected the break.

"Eve," he said, quickly, "won't you let me take you away from here? You've no business in this sort of game. You're not tough enough. You've got to be loved and made a fuss of and----"

She laughed shakily.

"Perhaps you can give me the address of some lady who wants a companion to love and make a fuss of?"

"I can give you the address of a man."

She rested an arm on the mantelpiece and stood looking into the blaze, without replying.

Before he could speak again there was a step outside the door, and Mrs. Rastall-Retford rustled into the room.

Eve had not misread the storm-signals. Her employer's mood was still as it had been earlier in the day. Dinner passed in almost complete silence. Mrs. Rastall-Retford sat brooding dumbly. Her eye was cold and

menacing, and Peter, working his way through his vegetables, shuddered for Eve. He had understood her allusion to bridge, having been privileged several times during his stay to see his hostess play that game, and he hoped that there would be no bridge to-night.

And this was unselfish of him, for bridge meant sandwiches. Punctually at nine o'clock on bridge nights the butler would deposit on a side-table a plate of chicken sandwiches and (in deference to Peter's vegetarian views) a smaller plate of cheese sandwiches. At the close of play Mrs. Rastall-Retford would take one sandwich from each plate, drink a thimbleful of weak whisky and water, and retire.

Peter could always do with a sandwich or two these days. But he was prepared to abandon them joyfully if his hostess would waive bridge for this particular evening.

It was not to be. In the drawing-room Mrs. Rastall-Retford came out of her trance and called imperiously for the cards. Peter, when he saw his hand after the first deal, had a presentiment that if all his hands were to be as good as this, the evening was going to be a trying one. On the other occasions when they had played he had found it an extremely difficult task, even with moderate cards, to bring it about that his hostess should always win the odd rubber, for he was an excellent player, and, like most good players, had an artistic conscience which made it painful to him to play a deliberately bad game, even from the best motives. If all his hands were going to be as strong as this first one he saw that there was disaster ahead. He could not help winning.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford, who had dealt the first hand, made a most improper diamond declaration. Her son unfilially doubled, and, Eve having chicane--a tragedy which her partner evidently seemed to consider could have been avoided by the exercise of ordinary common sense--Peter and his partner, despite Peter's best efforts, won the game handsomely.

The son of the house dealt the next hand. Eve sorted her cards listlessly. She was feeling curiously tired. Her brain seemed dulled.

This hand, as the first had done, went all in favour of the two men. Mr. Rastall-Retford won five tricks in succession, and, judging from the glitter in his mild eye, was evidently going to win as many more as he possibly could. Mrs. Rastall-Retford glowered silently. There was electricity in the air.

The son of the house led a club. Eve played a card mechanically.

"Have you no clubs, Miss Hendrie?"

Eve started, and looked at her hand.

"No," she said.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford grunted suspiciously.

Not long ago, in Westport, Connecticut, U.S.A., a young man named Harold Sperry, a telephone worker, was boring a hole in the wall of a house with a view to passing a wire through it. He whistled joyously as he worked. He did not know that he had selected for purposes of perforation the exact spot where there lay, nestling in the brickwork, a large leaden water-pipe. The first intimation he had of that fact was when a jet of water suddenly knocked him fifteen feet into a rosebush.

As Harold felt then, so did Eve now, when, examining her hand once more to make certain that she had no clubs, she discovered the ace of that ilk peeping coyly out from behind the seven of spades.

Her face turned quite white. It is never pleasant to revoke at bridge, but to Eve just then it seemed a disaster beyond words. She looked across at her partner. Her imagination pictured the scene there would be ere long, unless----

It happens every now and then that the human brain shows in a crisis an unwonted flash of speed. Eve's did at this juncture. To her in her trouble there came a sudden idea.

She looked round the table. Mr. Rastall-Retford, having taken the last trick, had gathered it up in the introspective manner of one planning big _coups_, and was brooding tensely, with knit brows. His mother was frowning over her cards. She was unobserved.

She seized the opportunity. She rose from her seat, moved quickly to the side-table, and, turning her back, slipped the fatal card dexterously into the interior of a cheese sandwich.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford, absorbed, did not notice for an instant. Then she gave tongue.

"What are you doing, Miss Hendrie?"

Eve was breathing quickly.

"I--I thought that Mr. Rayner might like a sandwich."

She was at his elbow with the plate. It trembled in her hand.

"A sandwich! Kindly do not be so officious, Miss Hendrie. The idea--in the middle of a hand----" Her voice died away in a resentful mumble.

Peter started. He had been allowing his thoughts to wander. He looked from the sandwich to Eve and then at the sandwich again. He was puzzled. This had the aspect of being an olive-branch--could it be? Could she be meaning----? Or was it a subtle insult? Who could say? At any rate it was a sandwich, and he seized it, without prejudice.

"I hope at least you have had the sense to remember that Mr. Rayner is a vegetarian, Miss Hendrie," said Mrs. Rastall-Retford. "That is not a chicken sandwich?"

"No," said Eve; "it is not a chicken sandwich."

Peter beamed gratefully. He raised the olive-branch, and bit into it with the energy of a starving man. And as he did so he caught Eve's eye.

"Miss Hendrie!" cried Mrs. Rastall-Retford.

Eve started violently.

"Miss Hendrie, will you be good enough to play? The king of clubs to beat. I can't think what's the matter with you to-night."

"I'm very sorry," said Eve, and put down the nine of spades.

Mrs. Rastall-Retford glared.

"This is absurd," she cried. "You must have the ace of clubs. If you have not got it, who has? Look through your hand again. Is it there?"

"No."

"Then where can it be?"

"Where can it be?" echoed Peter, taking another bite.

"Why--why," said Eve, crimson, "I--I--have only five cards. I ought to have six."

"Five?" said Mrs. Rastall-Retford "Nonsense! Count again. Have you dropped it on the floor?"

Mr. Rastall-Retford stooped and looked under the table.

"It is not on the floor," he said. "I suppose it must have been missing from the pack before I dealt."

Mrs. Rastall-Retford threw down her cards and rose ponderously. It offended her vaguely that there seemed to be nobody to blame. "I shall go to bed," she said.

* * * * *

Peter stood before the fire and surveyed Eve as she sat on the sofa. They were alone in the room, Mr. Rastall-Retford having drifted silently away in the wake of his mother. Suddenly Eve began to laugh helplessly.

He shook his head at her.

"This is considerably sharper than a serpent's tooth," he said. "You should be fawning gratefully upon me, not laughing. Do you suppose King Charles laughed at my ancestor when he ate the despatches? However, for the first time since I have been in this house I feel as if I had had a square meal."

Eve became suddenly serious. The smile left her face.

"Mr. Rayner, please don't think I'm ungrateful. I couldn't help laughing, but I can't tell you how grateful I am. You don't know what it would have been like if she had found out that I had revoked. I did it once before, and she kept on about it for days and days. It was awful." She shivered. "I think you must be right, and my nerves _are_ going."

He nodded.

"So are you--to-morrow, by the first train. I wonder how soon we can get married. Do you know anything about special licenses?"

She looked at him curiously.

"You're very obstinate," she said.

"Firm," he corrected. "Firm. Could you pack to-night, do you think, and be ready for that ten-fifty to-morrow morning?"

She began to trace an intricate pattern on the floor with the point of her shoe.

"I can't imagine why you are fond of me!" she said. "I've been very horrid to you."

"Nonsense. You've been all that's sweet and womanly."

"And I want to tell you why," she went on. "Your--your sister----"

"Ah, I thought as much!"

"She--she saw that you seemed to be getting fond of me, and she----"

"She would!"

"Said some rather horrid things that--hurt," said Eve, in a low voice.

Peter crossed over to where she sat and took her hand.

"Don't you worry about her," he said. "She's not a bad sort really, but about once every six months she needs a brotherly talking-to, or she gets above herself. One is about due during the next few days."

He stroke her hand.

"Fasting," he said, thoughtfully, "clears and stimulates the brain. I fancy I shall be able to think out some rather special things to say to her this time."



THE APPARITION

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Maupassant Original Short Stories (180)*,
Complete, by Guy de Maupassant

The subject of sequestration of the person came up in speaking of a recent lawsuit, and each of us had a story to tell--a true story, he said. We had been spending the evening together at an old family mansion in the Rue de Grenelle, just a party of intimate friends. The old Marquis de la Tour-Samuel, who was eighty-two, rose, and, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, said in his somewhat shaky voice:

"I also know of something strange, so strange that it has haunted me all my life. It is now fifty-six years since the incident occurred, and yet not a month passes that I do not see it again in a dream, so great is the impression of fear it has left on my mind. For ten minutes I experienced

such horrible fright that ever since then a sort of constant terror has remained with me. Sudden noises startle me violently, and objects imperfectly distinguished at night inspire me with a mad desire to flee from them. In short, I am afraid of the dark!

"But I would not have acknowledged that before I reached my present age. Now I can say anything. I have never receded before real danger, ladies. It is, therefore, permissible, at eighty-two years of age, not to be brave in presence of imaginary danger.

"That affair so completely upset me, caused me such deep and mysterious and terrible distress, that I never spoke of it to any one. I will now tell it to you exactly as it happened, without any attempt at explanation.

"In July, 1827, I was stationed at Rouen. One day as I was walking along the quay I met a man whom I thought I recognized without being able to recall exactly who he was. Instinctively I made a movement to stop. The stranger perceived it and at once extended his hand.

"He was a friend to whom I had been deeply attached as a youth. For five years I had not seen him; he seemed to have aged half a century. His hair was quite white and he walked bent over as though completely exhausted. He apparently understood my surprise, and he told me of the misfortune which had shattered his life.

"Having fallen madly in love with a young girl, he had married her, but after a year of more than earthly happiness she died suddenly of an affection of the heart. He left his country home on the very day of her burial and came to his town house in Rouen, where he lived, alone and unhappy, so sad and wretched that he thought constantly of suicide.

"'Since I have found you again in this manner,' he said, 'I will ask you to render me an important service. It is to go and get me out of the desk in my bedroom--our bedroom--some papers of which I have urgent need. I cannot send a servant or a business clerk, as discretion and absolute silence are necessary. As for myself, nothing on earth would induce me to reenter that house. I will give you the key of the room, which I myself locked on leaving, and the key of my desk, also a few words for my gardener, telling him to open the chateau for you. But come and breakfast with me tomorrow and we will arrange all that.'

"I promised to do him the slight favor he asked. It was, for that matter, only a ride which I could make in an hour on horseback, his property being but a few miles distant from Rouen.

"At ten o'clock the following day I breakfasted, *tete-a-tete*, with my friend, but he scarcely spoke.

"He begged me to pardon him; the thought of the visit I was about to make to that room, the scene of his dead happiness, overcame him, he said. He, indeed, seemed singularly agitated and preoccupied, as though undergoing some mysterious mental struggle.

"At length he explained to me exactly what I had to do. It was very simple. I must take two packages of letters and a roll of papers from the first right-hand drawer of the desk, of which I had the key. He added:

"'I need not beg you to refrain from glancing at them.'

"I was wounded at that remark and told him so somewhat sharply. He stammered:

"'Forgive me, I suffer so,' and tears came to his eyes.

"At about one o'clock I took leave of him to accomplish my mission.

"The weather was glorious, and I trotted across the fields, listening to the song of the larks and the rhythmical clang of my sword against my boot. Then I entered the forest and walked my horse. Branches of trees caressed my face as I passed, and now and then I caught a leaf with my teeth and chewed it, from sheer gladness of heart at being alive and vigorous on such a radiant day.

"As I approached the chateau I took from my pocket the letter I had for the gardener, and was astonished at finding it sealed. I was so irritated that I was about to turn back without having fulfilled my promise, but reflected that I should thereby display undue susceptibility. My friend in his troubled condition might easily have fastened the envelope without noticing that he did so.

"The manor looked as if it had been abandoned for twenty years. The open gate was falling from its hinges, the walks were overgrown with grass and the flower beds were no longer distinguishable.

"The noise I made by kicking at a shutter brought out an old man from a side door. He seemed stunned with astonishment at seeing me. On receiving my letter, he read it, reread it, turned it over and over, looked me up and down, put the paper in his pocket and finally said:

"'Well, what is it you wish?'

"I replied shortly:

"'You ought to know, since you have just read your master's orders. I wish to enter the chateau.'

"He seemed overcome.

"Then you are going in--into her room?"

"I began to lose patience.

"Damn it! Are you presuming to question me?"

"He stammered in confusion:

"No--sir--but--but it has not been opened since--since the death. If you will be kind enough to wait five minutes I will go and--and see if--"

"I interrupted him angrily:

"See here, what do you mean by your tricks?"

"You know very well you cannot enter the room, since here is the key!"

"He no longer objected.

"Then, sir, I will show you the way."

"Show me the staircase and leave me. I'll find my way without you."

"But--sir--indeed--"

"This time I lost patience, and pushing him aside, went into the house.

"I first went through the kitchen, then two rooms occupied by this man and his wife. I then crossed a large hall, mounted a staircase and recognized the door described by my friend.

"I easily opened it, and entered the apartment. It was so dark that at first I could distinguish nothing. I stopped short, disagreeably affected by that disagreeable, musty odor of closed, unoccupied rooms. As my eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness I saw plainly enough a large and disordered bedroom, the bed without sheets but still retaining its mattresses and pillows, on one of which was a deep impression, as though an elbow or a head had recently rested there.

"The chairs all seemed out of place. I noticed that a door, doubtless that of a closet, had remained half open.

"I first went to the window, which I opened to let in the light, but the fastenings of the shutters had grown so rusty that I could not move them.

I even tried to break them with my sword, but without success. As I was growing irritated over my useless efforts and could now see fairly well in the semi-darkness, I gave up the hope of getting more light, and went over to the writing desk.

"I seated myself in an armchair and, letting down the lid of the desk, I opened the drawer designated. It was full to the top. I needed but three packages, which I knew how to recognize, and began searching for them.

"I was straining my eyes in the effort to read the superscriptions when I seemed to hear, or, rather, feel, something rustle back of me. I paid no attention, believing that a draught from the window was moving some drapery. But in a minute or so another movement, almost imperceptible, sent a strangely disagreeable little shiver over my skin. It was so stupid to be affected, even slightly, that self-respect prevented my turning around. I had just found the second package I needed and was about to lay my hand on the third when a long and painful sigh, uttered just at my shoulder, made me bound like a madman from my seat and land several feet off. As I jumped I had turned round my hand on the hilt of my sword, and, truly, if I had not felt it at my side I should have taken to my heels like a coward.

"A tall woman dressed in white, stood gazing at me from the back of the chair where I had been sitting an instant before.

"Such a shudder ran through all my limbs that I nearly fell backward. No one who has not experienced it can understand that frightful, unreasoning terror! The mind becomes vague, the heart ceases to beat, the entire body grows as limp as a sponge.

"I do not believe in ghosts, nevertheless I collapsed from a hideous dread of the dead, and I suffered, oh! I suffered in a few moments more than in all the rest of my life from the irresistible terror of the supernatural. If she had not spoken I should have died perhaps. But she spoke, she spoke in a sweet, sad voice that set my nerves vibrating. I dare not say that I became master of myself and recovered my reason. No! I was terrified and scarcely knew what I was doing. But a certain innate pride, a remnant of soldierly instinct, made me, almost in spite of myself, maintain a bold front. She said:

""Oh, sir, you can render me a great service."

"I wanted to reply, but it was impossible for me to pronounce a word. Only a vague sound came from my throat. She continued:

""Will you? You can save me, cure me. I suffer frightfully. I suffer, oh! how I suffer!" and she slowly seated herself in my armchair, still looking at me.

"'Will you?' she said.

"I nodded in assent, my voice still being paralyzed.

"Then she held out to me a tortoise-shell comb and murmured:

"'Comb my hair, oh! comb my hair; that will cure me; it must be combed. Look at my head--how I suffer; and my hair pulls so!'

"Her hair, unbound, very long and very black, it seemed to me, hung over the back of the armchair and touched the floor.

"Why did I promise? Why did I take that comb with a shudder, and why did I hold in my hands her long black hair that gave my skin a frightful cold sensation, as though I were handling snakes? I cannot tell.

"That sensation has remained in my fingers, and I still tremble in recalling it.

"I combed her hair. I handled, I know not how, those icy locks. I twisted, knotted, and unknotted, and braided them. She sighed, bowed her head, seemed happy. Suddenly she said, 'Thank you!' snatched the comb from my hands and fled by the door that I had noticed ajar.

"Left alone, I experienced for several seconds the horrible agitation of one who awakens from a nightmare. At length I regained my senses. I ran to the window and with a mighty effort burst open the shutters, letting a flood of light into the room. Immediately I sprang to the door by which that being had departed. I found it closed and immovable!

"Then the mad desire to flee overcame me like a panic the panic which soldiers know in battle. I seized the three packets of letters on the open desk, ran from the room, dashed down the stairs four steps at a time, found myself outside, I know not how, and, perceiving my horse a few steps off, leaped into the saddle and galloped away.

"I stopped only when I reached Rouen and alighted at my lodgings. Throwing the reins to my orderly, I fled to my room and shut myself in to reflect. For an hour I anxiously asked myself if I were not the victim of a hallucination. Undoubtedly I had had one of those incomprehensible nervous attacks those exaltations of mind that give rise to visions and are the stronghold of the supernatural. And I was about to believe I had seen a vision, had a hallucination, when, as I approached the window, my eyes fell, by chance, upon my breast. My military cape was covered with long black hairs! One by one, with trembling fingers, I plucked them off and threw them away.

"I then called my orderly. I was too disturbed, too upset to go and see my friend that day, and I also wished to reflect more fully upon what I ought to tell him. I sent him his letters, for which he gave the soldier a receipt. He asked after me most particularly, and, on being told I was ill--had had a sunstroke--appeared exceedingly anxious. Next morning I went to him, determined to tell him the truth. He had gone out the evening before and had not yet returned. I called again during the day; my friend was still absent. After waiting a week longer without news of him, I notified the authorities and a judicial search was instituted. Not the slightest trace of his whereabouts or manner of disappearance was discovered.

"A minute inspection of the abandoned chateau revealed nothing of a suspicious character. There was no indication that a woman had been concealed there.

"After fruitless researches all further efforts were abandoned, and for fifty-six years I have heard nothing; I know no more than before."



EMERALD

From The Internet Archive e-text of *Sasha*, by A. Kuprin; translated by Douglas Ashby, 1920
(note: as this is an optical-scan, there are errors in the text. Distributed Proofreaders take heed.)

"I dedicate this story to the memory of that incomparable piebald race-horse, Kholstomer."

EMERALD, the four-year-old, a full-grown race-horse of American breed, of a uniform grey, steel-like colour, woke up as usual at about midnight in his loose box. The other horses, his neighbours on the left and right and opposite on the other side of the passage, were chewing hay with quick regularity, as though they were keeping time, crunching it with reUsh between their teeth and, every now and then, sniffing on account of the dust. On a heap of hay in a corner, slept the stable-boy on duty. Emerald knew by the sequence of days and by the particular snore that it was VassiU, a lad whom the horses disUked, because he smoked a reeking tobacco in the stables frequently came in drunk, pounded their beUies with his knees, shook his fists in their eyes, tugged their

halters roughly, and always addressed them in an unnatural, hoarse, threatening voice.

Emerald went up to the railed entrance opposite which, facing him in her stable, stood a young black not yet full-grown, mare, named Chegohkha. Emerald could not see her body in the dark, but every time that she left off munching the hay and turned her head her large eyes would gleam for a few seconds with a Set V purple fire. Emerald drew a long breath with delicate dilated nostrils as he took in the scarcely noticeable, but insistent, agitating, odour of her skin and gave a short neigh.

The mare turned round quickly and answered with a light, trerabHng, and playful neighing.

From the box, immediately on his right, Emerald heard a jealous, angry breathing. It came from old Onieguine, a vicious chestnut, who still appeared from time to time in the town races.

The two horses were separated by a light board partition and could not see each other, but, by placing his nose on the rail, Emerald could catch easily the warm odour of the chewed hay as it came from the panting nostrils of the chestnut. In this way, for some little time, the two horses sniffed at each other in the darkness, their ears flat on their heads, their necks arched as they grew more and more angry. Then, all of a sudden, each of them gave tongue to his rage, stamping fiercely at the same moment.

"Stop that nonsense, you devils," the stable-boy shouted at them sleepily, but with the familiar threat in his voice.

The horses sprang back from the rails and pricked up their ears. Their hostility towards each other was of long standing, but only a few days before this there had been brought into this very stable that graceful black mare, a quite unusual occurrence, due to lack of space just before the races. And now not a day passed without a quarrel between them. In the stables, on the race-track, and when they were taken to water, they would provoke each other to fight. But in his soul Emerald felt a certain fear of this long, self-assertive chestnut, a fear of that pungent smell of an angry horse, his rough,

camel-like Adam's apple, his gloomy, sunken eyes, and particularly of his strong, stone-like frame, hardened by years of training and previous combats.

Pretending to himself that he was not in the least afraid, and that nothing at all had happened, Emerald turned, bent his head into the manger, and rummaged the hay with his soft, mobile, supple lips. At first he just nibbled capriciously at separate morsels, but soon the gusto of chewing came over him and he really plunged into feeding. And at the same time slow indifferent thoughts were leaking into his head, linking together memories of shapes and perfumes and sounds, and then losing themselves finally in that dark abyss which lay before and behind everything except the passing moment.

Hay was the floating thought just now and he recalled the old stable-man, Nazar, who distributed the hay in the evening. That good old Nazar! He always has such a cosy smell of black bread and just a slight sniff of wine; his movements are gentle and unhurried; on his days the oats and hay taste better, and it is nice to listen to him, for, when grooming you, he talks to you in whispers, with just a tender reproach, and all the time he is wheezing to himself. But for all that, he lacks the main thing, the horse touch, and when he has you between the shafts you can feel, through the reins, that his hands are clumsy and inexact.

Vassili has not got that horseman feel either, and, though he shouts and strikes, all the horses know that he is a coward and they are not afraid of him. And he, too, is unable to drive — he pulls at you and gets nervous. The third stable-man, the squint-eyed one, is better than these two, but he has no love for horses and is cruel and impatient; besides, his hands are heavy as if they were made of wood. And the fourth, Andriashka, is still quite a boy and plays with the horses just like a sucking colt, stealthily kissing them on the upper lip, between the nostrils, which isn't particularly agreeable, but rather funny.

But that other one, the tall, thin, clean-shaven one with the stoop and the gold-rimmed glasses — oh, he's quite another affair. He's like some extraordinary horse, wise and strong and fearless. He never gets angry, never uses the whip, never even threatens, but,

all the same, when he's up in the American buggy, it is so nice, so terrifyingly pleasant, to obey every hint of his strong, clever, all-comprehending fingers. He alone can produce in Emerald that state of joyous harmony in which the whole force of the body lends itself to the rush of the race and makes one feel so light and merry.

And at once. Emerald saw in imagination the short track to the hippodrome, saw almost every house, every kerbstone, saw the sand of the hippodrome itself, the Tribune, the other horses, the green of the grass and the yellow of the track. Then suddenly he recalled the dark bay three-year-old who had recently twisted his foot on the track and had begun to limp. And thinking of him Emerald tried, mentally, to go lame himself just a Httle.

One bit of hay which Emerald had in his mouth had a pecuharly dehcate taste. The colt chewed it for some time, and long after he had swallowed it, he retained in his mouth the fine perfume of faded flowers and dry, odorous grass. Then a dim quite formless, far-off memory sHd into the horse's brain. This is just what happens sometimes with smokers when the chance inhaling of a cigarette brings back suddenly for an irresistible second the memory of a dark corridor with old wall-paper and a solitary candle on the buffet ; or else a long journey through the night with the regular tinkling of sledge bells and the sensation of languid sleepiness ; or else the dark blue wood, not too far off, the snow dazzling one's eyes, the noise of an approaching battue, the passionate impatience that makes one's knees tremble — all in a moment such bygone, forgotten, touching, but no longer translatable, feehngs slide into one's soul with a sombre and dim caress.

Meanwhile the little black window above the manger, invisible until now, began to get grey and to become faintly outlined in the darkness. The horses chewed more lazily and sighed one after the other deeply and softly. In the yard the cock sounded his familiar call. sonorous, bold, and sharp like a trumpet. And lar away in the distance, other cocks, each in turn, spread the summons of the morning.

With his head bent in the manger. Emerald was still trying to keep in his mouth and get back with renewed force that strange taste that had aroused in liim the

echo of an exquisite, almost physical, but incomprehensible memory. But he could not revive it and, before he knew where he was, he began to doze.

II

His feet and body were perfectly built ; that is why he always slept standing, scarcely swinging either backwards or forwards. Sometimes, though, he would give a start and then his deep sleep would pass for a few seconds into a light slumber. But the short intervals of sleep were so profound that the muscles, nerves, and skin of the horse were rested and refreshed.

It was just at dawn that he was dreaming of an early spring morning, a reddish streak suffusing the earth, and a low-lying sweet-scented meadow. The grass was thick and luscious, green as in some charming fairy-tale, but tinged by the dawn with a delicate pink just as human beings and animals see it in early childhood, the dew gleaming all over it like trembling fires. In the pure, rarefied air every sort of perfume comes to one with peculiar intensity. One catches, through the freshness of the morning, the smell of the blue and transparent smoke that curls over the village chimneys ; every flower in the meadow has a distinct scent ; on the moist broken road that leads into the town, innumerable scents are mingled with the smell of human beings, of tar, of horse-dung, of dust, and of cow's milk, fresh from a passing herd, of aromatic gum that drips from the pine trees over the hedge.

Emerald, a seven-months' stallion (his mane and tail cut short) is running aimlessly through the meadow, bending his neck and kicking out his hind legs. He seems to be made of air, and is not in the least conscious of the weight of his body. The white, perfumed camomile flowers keep running backwards under his feet. He whisks away straight on to the sun. The wet grass swishes against his feet, his knees, making them feel cold and dull just for the moment. The blue sky, the green grass, the golden sun, the exquisite air, the drunken ecstasy of youth, of strength and speed !

But just then he hears a short, restless, tender, and appealing neighing, so familiar to him that he can recog-

nise it at a distance among thousands of neighs. He stops short in his full gallop, listens for an instant, his head raised, his delicate ears moving and his broom-shaped, short downy tail shaking as he answers with a long-drawn call, with which the whole of his fine, thin, long-legged body vibrates. And then he speeds to his mother.

She — a quiet, bony old mare — raises her wet muzzle from the grass, smells over the colt quickly and attentively and then resumes her chewing as though she were in a hurry to finish a pressing business. Bending his flexible neck under her with upturned muzzle, the colt from habit thrusts his hips between her hind legs, to find a warm elastic nipple full of sweet, scarcely sourish, milk that flows, in hot little ripples, into his mouth. On and on he drinks and cannot tear himself from it. The brood mare shakes herself free at last and pretends to bite his groin.

It is quite light now in the stable. An old smelling, bearded goat who lives with the horses has approached the stable doors (that had been strengthened inside with beams) and commenced to bleat, looking backwards at the stable-boy Vassili, bare-footed, scratching his woolly head, got up to open them for him. The day was a regular autumn one, bluish and cold. The square in front of the open doors, was covered at once by the warm vapour that steamed out from the stables, while the aroma of the white frost and the fallen leaves penetrated delicately into the horses' stalls.

They knew well that oats were going to be served out to them and they were giving impatient grunts near their railings. The greedy and capricious Onieguine was stamping with his hoofs and was exhibiting his old bad habit of champing with his upper teeth against the chewed iron-bound brim of the manger, swallowing and belching out the morning air. Emerald, for his part, contented himself with rubbing his muzzle against the railing.

The other stable-men — there were four altogether — came in and began to distribute the oats in iron bins. While Nazar was heaping up the heavy rustling oats in Emerald's manger, the colt, his warm nostrils trembling, did his best to get at it, first over the old man's shoulder and then under his arm. The stableman, who

liked this impatience of a quiet horse, loitered purposely, barricaded the manger with his elbows and grumbled out in his rough, kindly way, " Now, you glutton . . . there's lots of time. . . . Punch me again with your nose, and I'll be punching you to-night."

From the little window, above the manger, rose a square joyous sun-beam in which millions of golden fragments of dust, divided by long shadows from the window-panes, were whirlung downwards.

III

Emerald had just finished his oats when they came to take him out into the yard. It was warmer now and the ground had become softer, but the stable walls were still white with frost. From the manure heaps, just taken out of the stables, rose a thick vapour, and the sparrows were swarming on them, chirruping excitedly as though they were quarrelling. Emerald bent his neck under the doorway and crossed the threshold carefully. Then he drank in joyfully deep draughts of the delicious air, shook the full length of his body and gave a sonorous sneeze. " Good health to you," observed Nazar quite gravely. Emerald would not keep still. He wanted vigorous movements, the tickling feeling of the air rushing into one's eyes and nostrils, the burning heart-beats and the long, deep breathing. Tied with a halter, he was neighing, dancing on his hind legs and curving his neck sideways to get a backward glimpse of the black mare, with one of his large rolling eyes, the whites of which were ribbed with little red veins.

Breathless from exertion, Nazar lifted high up above his head a pail of water, and dashed it upon the colt's back from crest to tail. This was a familiar sensation to Emerald, vigorous, pleasant, and always a little startling. Nazar brought more water and sprinkled his flanks, chest, feet, and tail with it. And each time that he soused him, his horny palm would pass over the horse's coat to mop off the water. Glancing backwards. Emerald could see his own sloping haunches suddenly darkened and then shining again, as with a varnish in the sun.

It was race-day. Emerald knew that by the way the stablemen hurried and bustled about the horses, some of whom had usually to wear horse-shoes ; others had to wear leather pads on their knees ; others had their hind legs bandaged with linen belts up to the knees, or their chests protected with fur-bordered coats that reached to the forelegs. From the coach-house they pulled out the two-wheeled American buggies with high seats ; their metal spokes shone merrily and their red rims and large red curved shafts glowed under a new coat of varnish.

Emerald was already quite dry, brushed, rubbed and groomed, when the head stableman, an Englishman, came in. Every man and horse in the stable had an equal respect for, and dread of, this tall, thin, long-handed man with the slight stoop. His clean-shaven face was sunburnt and his strong, thin lips were set in a mocking curve. He wore gold-rimmed glasses through which his light blue eyes looked straight out on the world with stubborn calmness. He watched the preparations, standing with his long legs wide apart in his high boots, his hands buried in his trouser pockets as he munched his cigar first at one corner of his mouth and then at the other. He wore a grey jacket with a fur collar and a narrow black cap with a long square peak. From time to time he made curt remarks in a jerky, careless tone and immediately all the stablemen and workmen turned their heads in his direction, while the horses pricked up their ears.

He paid particular attention to the harnessing of Emerald and examined the horse minutely from crest to hoof. And as Emerald felt the sure attentive glance he lifted his head proudly, slightly arched his supple neck, and raised his delicate, almost transparent, ears. The Englishman tested the girth, slipping his finger between it and the horse's belly. Then they threw over the horse's grey linen horse-cloths with red borders, red circles round the eyes, and red monograms laid down on their hind legs. Two stable-boys, Nazar and the squint-eyed one, took a rein on each side of Emerald and led him to the hippodrome along the well-known road between two rows of scattered, large stone buildings. It was scarcely four versts to the racecourse.

There were already several horses in the enclosure ;

they were taken round the circle all in the same direction as in the actual race, that is to say, in the opposite direction of the hands of a watch. In the enclosure they were leading medium-sized strong-legged horses, with docked tails, among whom Emerald quickly recognised the little white colt who always raced near him. Both horses greeted each other with a quiet and kindly neigh.

IV

A bell was rung. The stable-men removed Emerald's horse-cloth. The Englishman, his eyes blinking under his spectacles owing to the sun, was showing his long yellow horse-like teeth as he came up with a whip under his arm, buttoning his gloves on his way. One of the stable-men picked up Emerald's fluffy tail that reached almost to the back of his knees and placed it carefully on the seat of the racing buggy so that its light-coloured tip stuck out at the back. The shafts gave like elastic under the driver's weight. Emerald took a peep round and saw him sitting almost over his haunches, his feet stretched wide apart on the shafts. Without any hurry, the driver took up the reins, then he shouted a brief order to the stable-men, who at once let go of the reins. Rejoicing at the coming race, Emerald at first plunged forward, but, reined in by those strong hands, he merely reared on his hind legs, shook his neck, and ran through the enclosure gate to the hippodrome at a strong restrained trot.

Along the wooden fence that formed an ellipse of a verst, ran a large racing track, covered with yellow sand that was compact and slightly moist, thus at once yielding to and responding to the pressure of hoofs. The sharp hoof-marks and the straight stripes from the gutta-percha tyres furrowed it.

They ran past the Tribune, a high wooden building with a frontage of two hundred horse-lengths at least, where, like a mountain extending to the very roof, which was itself supported by thin pillars, a black human crowd buzzed and swayed. Through a slight, scarcely perceptible, motion of the reins Emerald understood that he might increase his pace, and snorted gratefully in response.

He was trotting deliberately, hardly moving his back

and keeping his neck stretched forward, but a little to the left, his muzzle lifted firm and high. Thanks to a restrained, though unusually long, pace his running produced from a distance no impression of speed. It seemed that the racer measured the road without hurrying, his forelegs, straight as a compass, scarcely touching the ground with the tips of the hoofs. It was the result of real American training in which everything combined to sustain the horse's wind and diminish to the utmost extent the resistance of the air. Under this regime all movements unnecessary to running are held to waste unproductively the horse's strength, and beauty of form is sacrificed to that lightness, dryness, long wind, and energy which transform the horse into a faultless living machine.

Now in this interlude between races the walking of the horses, so necessary to a trotter's lungs, was taking place. Many were running in the outer circle in the same direction as Emerald and in the inner in the opposite direction. A big dapple-grey, with a white muzzle, of the pure Orloff breed with a high short neck, and a tail like piping, the whole resembling a ginger-bread horse at a fair, ran past Emerald ; his heaving flanks and large fat chest were steaming and darkened by sweat as he ran, throwing his forelegs sideways from the knees, while, at every pace, there rang from his spleen a sharp sound.

Then came behind him a stately, long-bodied, brown half-bred mare with a thin dark mane. She was beautifully trained on the same American system as Emerald ; her short, well-cared-for coat was so glossy that it revealed the play of the muscles under the skin. While the drivers were talking over something or other, the two horses ran for a little side by side. Emerald sniffed at the mare, quite prepared to make friends on the way, but the Englishman did not permit this and Emerald submitted.

Then there met them at full trot an enormous black colt swathed in bandages, knee-caps, and pads. His left shaft stretched out a yard and a half longer than the right and a bearing rein clasped on the top and on both sides through a ring the nervous muzzle of the horse in its steel grip. As the mare glanced at him simultaneously each of them instantly recognised a racer of wonderful strength, speed, and endurance, but curiously

stubborn and bad-tempered, conceited and very touchy. Just behind the black horse ran a pale grey colt, very spruce but ludicrously small. Looking at him sideways one would have thought he was whisking away at a terrific rate, so often did he throw out his feet, so high did he raise his knees and arch his short neck, while his small pretty head had such an earnest, business-like expression. Emerald merely squinted at him contemptuously and moved one ear in his direction.

The other driver stopped talking, with a short, loud laugh, like a neigh, and gave the mare her head. Quietly, without any effort, as if her speed had nothing to do with her, the mare shot ahead of Emerald, her shining back smooth and regular, with a scarcely noticeable little strap outlining her spine.

But a red fire-like racer with a large white spot on his muzzle caught up Emerald and her and soon left both behind. He galloped with long bounds, now stretching himself and almost stooping to the ground, and now almost joining his fore and hind legs in the air. His driver was lying, rather than sitting, on the box, his body thrown backwards as he hung on to the taut reins. Emerald got excited and lurched sideways, but the invisible Englishman pulled on the reins and, all of a sudden, those hands, so supple and so sensitive to every movement of a horse, became like iron. Near the tribune the red colt, after another gallop round the ring, caught up to Emerald once more. Till then he had been galloping and he was already in a lather, with bloodshot eyes and panting breath. His driver, leaning forward, was lashing him along the back with all his might. At last the stable-man managed to bar his course and seized the reins close to his muzzle, after which he was led away from the ring wet, wheezing, trembling, grown thin in a minute. Emerald did another half lap at a full trot, then turned on to the path which cut across the racecourse, and made his way back through the gate into the yard.

A bell rang several times on the hippodrome. Beyond the open gate the racehorses were running like lightning from time to time, while the people on the Grand Stand shouted and applauded. Emerald, huddled up with the other horses, was stepping out beside Nazar, shaking

his bent head and moving his ears in their linen cases. After his exercise his blood ran merry and hot in his veins ; his breathing grew deeper and freer as his body became more rested and cooler, while in every muscle he could feel the renewed longing for the race.

Half an hour went by. Another bell sounded on the hippodrome. Now the driver sat on the racing buggy without his gloves. His hands were large, white, magical, and inspired Emerald with both devotion and fear.

The Englishman drove out unhurriedly to the race track, from which horses were fiUng out on their way to the yard after finishing their walk. In the enclosure only Emerald and the enormous black colt whom he had met on that prehminary drive were left. The stands, from top to bottom, were black with a dense human crowd, and from this black mass emerged, gaily and untidily, countless white faces and hands, varie-gated umbrellas, women's hats, and airily swung programmes. Gradually quickening his pace, as he passed the stands. Emerald felt thousands of eyes following liira fixedly. And he realised clearly that these eyes expected from him swiftiness, the full tension of his strength, the full beating of his heart — and this understanding communicated to his muscles a joyous lightness and a coquettish precision of movement, A white horse of his acquaintance, ridden by a boy, was going at a hand gallop to his right.

With a regular measured trot, bending his body slightly to the left, Emerald traced an angular turn and moved up to the post with the red disc. A bell rang out curtly on the hippodrome. The Enghshman imperceptibly straightened himself on the box seat and his hands became suddenly firmer, " Now go, but nurse your strength. It's too soon now." Emerald understood and, to show his comprehension, he lowered for a second and then straightened his fine sensitive ears. The white colt was galloping regularly at his side and a Httle behind. Emerald could feel close to his crest the horse's fresh, even breath.

The red post flew behind him ; another sharp turn, the path straightens itself and the second stand comes nearer, blackens, becomes variegated with its buzzing crowd and grows larger with every step. " Faster,"

the driver permits — "faster, faster." Emerald grows a little excited and wants to throw into the race all his strength. " May I ? " he thinks to himself, " No, it's still too soon, don't be excited," answer the soothing, magic hands ; " afterwards."

The two colts pass the winning-posts at the same second but from opposite sides of the diameter linking the two stands. The slight resistance of the thread and the sense of its being broken made Emerald prick his ears, but he instantly forgot about it, so absorbed was he by those marvellous hands. " A little faster, but don't get excited. Go evenly," his driver orders. The black rocking tribune swims past him ; another hundred yards or so, and all four of them — Emerald, the young white colt, the Englishman and the boy who, standing on his short stirrups, was almost over the horse's mane — merge themselves in one close, rushing mass of speed, animated by one will, one beauty of powerful movement, one rhythm resonant as music. " Rat-tat -tat," exactly and regularly. Emerald beats out with his hoofs. " Tra-ta-tra-ta," curtly and sharply the hoofs of the white horse reply. Another turn and the second stand rushes towards them. " Shall I force the pace ? " Emerald asks. " Yes," reply the hands, " but coolly."

The second stand flies swiftly by. The people are shouting out something. It distracts Emerald. He gets excited, loses the feeling of the reins, loses his step for a second, and gives four capricious beats with his right hoof. But the reins immediately become hard, tear his mouth, wring his neck downwards and force his head to the right. Now he can't gallop with the right feet. Emerald grows angry and refuses to change his feet, but the driver, seizing his moment, coolly and authoritatively pulls him into a trot. The stand is now far behind him. Emerald gets back into his pace and the hands become friendly and soft once more. Emerald feels that he has done wrong and wants to double his pace. " But oh no, it's too soon yet," the hands observe kindly. " We'll have time to make up for this. Don't worry."

And so they pass in perfect harmony without any change of pace a full round and a half. But the black colt is in perfect form to-day ; while Emerald had been out of step, he had had time to outdistance him by six lengths. Emerald, however, makes up for the lost

time and, at the last post but one, he is three seconds and a quarter ahead. " Now you can do it. Go," the driver orders. Emerald draws back his ears and gives one quick glance behind him. The Englishman's face burns with a sharp, decisive expression ; his clean-shaven hps have wrinkled into an impatient grimace, exposing his long yellow clenched teeth. " Now for the last ounce ! " the reins in the high uplifted hands order; "faster, faster." Suddenly the Englishman shouts in a loud vibrating voice that rises Uke a siren : " Oh— eh, eh— eh ! "

"There, there, there, there," the boy behind them shouts shrilly in tune.

The rhythm has now reached its highest pitch and the tension hangs on a single hair, almost ready to snap. " Ta-ta-ta," regularly stamp out on the ground Emerald's feet. " Trra, trra, trra," one hears ahead the gallop of the white colt spurring Emerald on. The elastic shafts swing in time with the race, and the boy, almost lying on his horse's neck, rises in his saddle to the rhythm of the gallop.

The air, rushing to meet one, whistles in one's ears and tickles the nostrils, from which great streams of steam emerge. It becomes more difficult to breathe and one's skin burns. Emerald takes the last turn, all his body swerving in the middle of it. The stand becomes alive with the roar from a thousand throats, frightening, troubling, and gladdening Emerald all at once. He can trot no longer but wants to gallop, only those astonishing hands behind him implore and order and soothe : " Don't gallop, my dear. Whatever you do, don't gallop; that's it, that's it, just hke that ; that's it." And Emerald, rushing past the post, breaks the control thread, without even noticing it. Shouts, laughter, a torrent of applause is hurled down from the stand. The white leaves of the race-programme, umbrellas, sticks, hats turn and flash amid a sea of hands and faces. The EngUshman throws the reins aside gently. " It's all over, my dear, thanks," this movement says to Emerald, as he, with difficulty, recovers from the impetus of the race and slows down to a walk. At this moment the black colt is just arriving at his post, seven seconds later, on the opposite side.

The Englishman raises his stiff legs with difficulty,

jumps heavily from the buggy, takes off the padded seat, and goes with it to the weighing. Stable-men run up to fling a horsecloth over Emerald's hot back and take him to the yard. He is followed by the rumbling of the crowd and the loud bell of the members' pavilion. A slight yellowish froth falls from the horse's mouth on the ground and on the stable-man's hands.

A few minutes later Emerald, already unharnessed, is brought back to the judge's box. A tall man, with a long coat and a new shining hat, whom Emerald has often seen in his stable, pats him on the neck and thrusts a lump of sugar straight into his mouth. The Englishman is standing there in the crowd, smiling, wrinkling his face, as he grins with his long teeth. The horsecloth is removed from Emerald and he is put in front of a box, standing on three feet and covered with a black cloth, under which a man in grey is hiding himself, busy with something or other.

But already people are swarming down from the grand stand in a black, serried mass. They come close to the horse on all sides, shouting, waving their hands, stretching out close to one another their red, sweating faces, with gleaming eyes. They are dissatisfied about something. They thrust their fingers in the feet, the head, the flanks of Emerald, rumple his hair on the left flank where there is a brand, and roar out altogether, " A false trotter ! A fake ! A swindle ! Money back ! " Emerald listens to this without understanding the words and moves his ears anxiously. " What's it all about ? " he thinks with surprise, " when I've been running so well ! " Then for a second the Englishman's face leaps before his eyes. Usually so calm, slightly mocking and firm, it is now burning with anger. And all of a sudden the Englishman shouts something in a high guttural voice, swings his arm quickly, and the sound of a blow cuts drily through the general turmoil.

VI

Emerald was taken home and three hours later he was given oats. In the evening, when he was watered at the well, he could see the large yellow moon rising behind the edge of a cloud and this inspired him with a dark dread.

Then began the dull days.

He was not taken out any more either for exercise or walks or to races. But every day strangers, crowds of people, came, and for their benefit Emerald was dragged out into the yard, where they examined him and felt him all over, their hands crawling into his mouth, scrubbing his coat with pumice-stone, all shouting at each other together.

Afterwards, he remembered, he was once taken out of the stable, late in the evening, and led for a long time through stony, empty streets, past houses and lit-up windows. Then came the station, a dark shaky horse-box, his feet trembling from fatigue after a long journey, the whistles of the engines, the rattle of the rails, the stifling smell of smoke, the dull light of the swinging lantern. At one station he was dumped out of the horse-box and led along an endless unknown road that ran between huge bare autumn fields, past villages until he reached an unfamiliar stable, where he was shut up alone away from the other horses.

At the beginning he would still recall the races and think about his Englishman and Vassili and Nazar and Onieguine, often dreaming about them, but gradually he began to forget them all. He was hidden away for some reason or other, and his beautiful young body was pining and grieving and growing weak from inaction. And new strangers were constantly arriving, crowding round Emerald, prodding him, pulling him about and angrily abusing each other.

Sometimes Emerald could catch glimpses, through the open door, of other horses walking and running about in freedom. Then he would shout to them in protest and complaint. But the door was instantly closed again, and time would crawl once more, dull and lonely, for Emerald.

The head of this stable was a large-headed sleepy man with small black eyes and a thin black moustache on his fat face. He seemed to be quite indifferent to Emerald, but the horse felt an incomprehensible fear of him. And then once, early in the morning, while all the stablemen were still asleep, this man came noiselessly up to Emerald on tip-toe, poured oats into his manger, and left the stable. Emerald was a little surprised, but began obediently to eat. The oats were nice, just a

little bitter, but pleasant to the taste for all that.
" It's odd," thought Emerald, " I never tasted such
oats before."

Then, all of a sudden, he became conscious of a slight
colic. Pain came, it stopped, then came back stronger
than ever, and grew sharper every minute. At last
it became intolerable. Emerald began to moan dully.
Wheels of fire were dancing before his eyes ; all his body
was wet and flabby from this sudden weakness. His
feet shivered, bent under him, and the colt fell heavily
on the floor. He tried to get up again, but could
only raise himself on his forelegs, and once more slipped
on his side. A buzzing turmoil whirled through his
head ; the Englishman swam by with his horse-like grin
from the long teeth ; Onieguine ran by, neighing loudly,
with his camel-hke Adam's apple projecting beneath
his jaw. Some force or other was dragging Emerald
mercilessly and ruthlessly deep down into a dark, cold
hole. Already he was unable to move.

Suddenly convulsions passed over his feet and neck
and arched his back. The horse's skin began to tremble
in small swift ripples and became covered with a froth
that had a pungent smell.

The moving yellow light of the lantern played straight
into his eyes "for a second and then died away with his
failing eyesight. His ear caught once more a coarse
human shout, but already he was unable to feel himself
pushed in the side by someone's heel. Then every-
thing disappeared — for ever.



THE SOUL OF LAPLOSHKA

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Reginald in Russia*, by Saki

Laploshka was one of the meanest men I have ever met, and quite one of
the most entertaining. He said horrid things about other people in such
a charming way that one forgave him for the equally horrid things he said
about oneself behind one's back. Hating anything in the way of
ill-natured gossip ourselves, we are always grateful to those who do it

for us and do it well. And Laploshka did it really well.

Naturally Laploshka had a large circle of acquaintances, and as he exercised some care in their selection it followed that an appreciable proportion were men whose bank balances enabled them to acquiesce indulgently in his rather one-sided views on hospitality. Thus, although possessed of only moderate means, he was able to live comfortably within his income, and still more comfortably within those of various tolerantly disposed associates.

But towards the poor or to those of the same limited resources as himself his attitude was one of watchful anxiety; he seemed to be haunted by a besetting fear lest some fraction of a shilling or franc, or whatever the prevailing coinage might be, should be diverted from his pocket or service into that of a hard-up companion. A two-franc cigar would be cheerfully offered to a wealthy patron, on the principle of doing evil that good may come, but I have known him indulge in agonies of perjury rather than admit the incriminating possession of a copper coin when change was needed to tip a waiter. The coin would have been duly returned at the earliest opportunity--he would have taken means to insure against forgetfulness on the part of the borrower--but accidents might happen, and even the temporary estrangement from his penny or sou was a calamity to be avoided.

The knowledge of this amiable weakness offered a perpetual temptation to play upon Laploshka's fears of involuntary generosity. To offer him a lift in a cab and pretend not to have enough money to pay the fair, to fluster him with a request for a sixpence when his hand was full of silver just received in change, these were a few of the petty torments that ingenuity prompted as occasion afforded. To do justice to Laploshka's resourcefulness it must be admitted that he always emerged somehow or other from the most embarrassing dilemma without in any way compromising his reputation for saying "No." But the gods send opportunities at some time to most men, and mine came one evening when Laploshka and I were supping together in a cheap boulevard restaurant. (Except when he was the bidden guest of some one with an irreproachable income, Laploshka was wont to curb his appetite for high living; on such fortunate occasions he let it go on an easy snaffle.) At the conclusion of the meal a somewhat urgent message called me away, and without heeding my companion's agitated protest, I called back cruelly, "Pay my share; I'll settle with you to-morrow." Early on the morrow Laploshka hunted me down by instinct as I walked along a side street that I hardly ever frequented. He had the air of a man who had not slept.

"You owe me two francs from last night," was his breathless greeting.

I spoke evasively of the situation in Portugal, where more trouble seemed brewing. But Laploshka listened with the abstraction of the deaf adder,

and quickly returned to the subject of the two francs.

"I'm afraid I must owe it to you," I said lightly and brutally. "I haven't a sou in the world," and I added mendaciously, "I'm going away for six months or perhaps longer."

Laploshka said nothing, but his eyes bulged a little and his cheeks took on the mottled hues of an ethnographical map of the Balkan Peninsula. That same day, at sundown, he died. "Failure of the heart's action," was the doctor's verdict; but I, who knew better, knew that he died of grief.

There arose the problem of what to do with his two francs. To have killed Laploshka was one thing; to have kept his beloved money would have argued a callousness of feeling of which I am not capable. The ordinary solution, of giving it to the poor, would by no means fit the present situation, for nothing would have distressed the dead man more than such a misuse of his property. On the other hand, the bestowal of two francs on the rich was an operation which called for some tact. An easy way out of the difficulty seemed, however, to present itself the following Sunday, as I was wedged into the cosmopolitan crowd which filled the side-aisle of one of the most popular Paris churches. A collecting-bag, for "the poor of Monsieur le Cure," was buffeting its tortuous way across the seemingly impenetrable human sea, and a German in front of me, who evidently did not wish his appreciation of the magnificent music to be marred by a suggestion of payment, made audible criticisms to his companion on the claims of the said charity.

"They do not want money," he said; "they have too much money. They have no poor. They are all pampered."

If that were really the case my way seemed clear. I dropped Laploshka's two francs into the bag with a murmured blessing on the rich of Monsieur le Cure.

Some three weeks later chance had taken me to Vienna, and I sat one evening regaling myself in a humble but excellent little Gasthaus up in the Währinger quarter. The appointments were primitive, but the Schnitzel, the beer, and the cheese could not have been improved on. Good cheer brought good custom, and with the exception of one small table near the door every place was occupied. Half-way through my meal I happened to glance in the direction of that empty seat, and saw that it was no longer empty. Poring over the bill of fare with the absorbed scrutiny of one who seeks the cheapest among the cheap was Laploshka. Once he looked across at me, with a comprehensive glance at my repast, as though to say, "It is my two francs you are eating," and then looked swiftly away. Evidently the poor of Monsieur le Cure had been genuine poor. The Schnitzel turned to leather in my mouth, the beer seemed tepid; I left the Emmenthaler untasted. My one idea was to get away from

the room, away from the table where _that_ was seated; and as I fled I felt Laploshka's reproachful eyes watching the amount that I gave to the piccolo--out of his two francs. I lunched next day at an expensive restaurant which I felt sure that the living Laploshka would never have entered on his own account, and I hoped that the dead Laploshka would observe the same barriers. I was not mistaken, but as I came out I found him miserably studying the bill of fare stuck up on the portals. Then he slowly made his way over to a milk-hall. For the first time in my experience I missed the charm and gaiety of Vienna life.

After that, in Paris or London or wherever I happened to be, I continued to see a good deal of Laploshka. If I had a seat in a box at a theatre I was always conscious of his eyes furtively watching me from the dim recesses of the gallery. As I turned into my club on a rainy afternoon I would see him taking inadequate shelter in a doorway opposite. Even if I indulged in the modest luxury of a penny chair in the Park he generally confronted me from one of the free benches, never staring at me, but always elaborately conscious of my presence. My friends began to comment on my changed looks, and advised me to leave off heaps of things. I should have liked to have left off Laploshka.

On a certain Sunday--it was probably Easter, for the crush was worse than ever--I was again wedged into the crowd listening to the music in the fashionable Paris church, and again the collection-bag was buffeting its way across the human sea. An English lady behind me was making ineffectual efforts to convey a coin into the still distant bag, so I took the money at her request and helped it forward to its destination. It was a two-franc piece. A swift inspiration came to me, and I merely dropped my own sou into the bag and slid the silver coin into my pocket. I had withdrawn Laploshka's two francs from the poor, who should never have had the legacy. As I backed away from the crowd I heard a woman's voice say, "I don't believe he put my money in the bag. There are swarms of people in Paris like that!" But my mind was lighter that it had been for a long time.

The delicate mission of bestowing the retrieved sum on the deserving rich still confronted me. Again I trusted to the inspiration of accident, and again fortune favoured me. A shower drove me, two days later, into one of the historic churches on the left bank of the Seine, and there I found, peering at the old wood-carvings, the Baron R., one of the wealthiest and most shabbily dressed men in Paris. It was now or never. Putting a strong American inflection into the French which I usually talked with an unmistakable British accent, I catechised the Baron as to the date of the church's building, its dimensions, and other details which an American tourist would be certain to want to know. Having acquired such information as the Baron was able to impart on short notice, I solemnly placed the two-franc piece in his hand, with the hearty assurance that it was "pour vous," and turned to go. The Baron

was slightly taken aback, but accepted the situation with a good grace. Walking over to a small box fixed in the wall, he dropped Laploshka's two francs into the slot. Over the box was the inscription, "Pour les pauvres de M. le Cure."

That evening, at the crowded corner by the Cafe de la Paix, I caught a fleeting glimpse of Laploshka. He smiled, slightly raised his hat, and vanished. I never saw him again. After all, the money had been _given_ to the deserving rich, and the soul of Laploshka was at peace.



VIGNETTES FROM A LIFE OF TWO MONTHS

From Internet Archive's optical-scan etext of *The Real Motive*, by Dorothy Canfield

In the beginning he was almost always immured in the profound sleep of new babyhood. Only hunger, the master of us all, could penetrate into that impregnable fastness. Even pain was frequently not able to awaken him. His mother was often astonished to hear him crying with a twinge of colic and yet to find his' eyes still tightly closed. But his mother was astonished at nearly everything he did.

A few weeks later there began to be brief periods when he was awake, and yet neither hungry nor in pain. This was usually when his mother, who was advanced and modern and did not rock her baby, laid him back in his little bed after a meal. He lay there in his long garments as motionless as a cocoon, his eyes wide open and fixed on nothing at all, in a seraphic beatitude. He was warm and dry, and his stomach was full of good food. What a heavenly boon was life !

There came other advances — ^most important of all was that he learned to distinguish light from darkness quite plainly. This was a great richness added to his life. In the evening when he woke up for the last meal of the day he lay and watched the brightness of the lamp for some time before hunger drove him to writhe his face into a wrinkled, toothless mask like that of a Japanese devil, and emit the scream

which always brought his mother to him in a rush. And in the daytime the ceiling's immense expanse of whiteness was a source of vast contemplation to him.

But for the most part he lay sleeping, and grew and grew and grew.

His mother was growing too, almost as fast as he, and at times she suffered terribly from growing pains. She did not know she was growing, nor did she recognize her discomforts as growing pains. She only knew that it was a time of tremendous stress for her, and that her life was strangely compounded of excitement, drudgery, happiness, revolt — ^and in those first few weeks, fatigue, penetrating fatigue, that was often as acute as the sharpest pain.

She had undergone a bewilderingly sudden promotion in life. Nature, with lavish generosity, had advanced her from the small and insignificant role of being the Most Important Person in the World to the very center of the stage, and had assigned to her the star part of a Useful Member of Society. The elevation was so sudden as to be staggering, and although she grew, grew faster than ever before in her life, there were moments when she was too small for the greater role and horribly ill at ease in it.

Ever since the nurse had gone she had been too frantically busy to make head or tail out of the maze of her contradictory emotions. Everything was so different from what she had planned during the long, still months of expectancy, when looking forward to this, she had laid out her life with ordered and complacent competence. She had decided firmly that she would avoid the usual mistakes made with first babies ; that she would not lose her head; she would not let the newcomer usurp too large a place in her own important life; she would not sacrifice her husband for the child; she would take care that she and the sacred House did not degenerate into slovenliness . . . ah, on her cramped, make-believe stage with what smug self-assurance had she played her part !

But now, set suddenly into the vast spaciousness of the first big reality of her life, grappling with the first real responsibility she had ever known, with the

first real work she had ever done, how unavailingly she struggled to master the situation! There was no denying that it mastered her.

During those first weeks, before her strength had altogether come back, to take care of the baby, to feed him, to be up with him at night, to wash his clothes, to attend to the necessary sterilization of utensils used near him, to read and re-read the maxims of the Book on the Rearing of Babies, to solve the ever-fresh problem as to what could be the matter with him when he fretted or cried — all this kept her every capacity in such distracted employment that if she had been asked outright she could not have told if she were happier now that he had come.

But for all her bewilderment, one new certainty was stamped upon every fiber of her mind and body as nothing had ever been before. There was at least one thing sure in all the dizzyingly shifting values of life. She must take care of her baby.

It was one of the principles of her life to utilize every moment, and she had in the beginning various schemes for self-improvement during the half-hours of the baby's meals. She could hold him with one arm easily and hold a book in the other hand. Half-an-hour seven times a day — why, it was a prodigious length of time ! She could do something really worth while in the reading line. She could, perhaps, at last read Gibbon. That would be an achievement!

In the scheme of things other plans were made for her. She found that her usually well-trained mind was not always under control. There was, for all its blankness, something compelling in the unwinking gaze of the baby's bright, wide-open eyes up into her face. In spite of what the learned books on infant physiology said, it seemed as though he could see her. Sitting thus, returning his steady gaze with another which became little by little as steady and as widely spacious, the regular tug, tug, tug of his little mouth, hypnotic in its regularity, beating like a quiet pulse through all her body, her spirit was liberated for whole moments from the petty restlessness of the mind and from the narrow bonds of consciousness.

Once, as she sat thus, mute, motionless, her head bowed over the small head on her bosom, brooding in the silence of the empty house, there shimmered before her eyes a dim vision of that "meaning of things," that ultimate reason for existence which had always eluded her anxious, groping search.

And the first word of her new knowledge was Renunciation, an humble realization that she herself was never to know the meaning of that vast insoluble riddle. But this did not mean hopelessness and inaction. It meant only that at last she knew that the key to the riddle was too huge for her to grasp. The united hands of a perfected and purified race alone could wield that mighty implement and learn the secret of existence. And in that ultimate great achievement she would have her share.

She knew now that her share was to be a strong and tempered link in the long chain which began in the first stirrings of the primordial sea and led . . . she would never know where. The generation before her had somehow formed her so that this vision was hers. And now she must do her part in opening the eyes of the next generation to a vision greater than she would ever see.

She looked down at the little head at her breast. Here was the next link in the chain. Would she be strong enough and wise enough to do her share of the forging and tempering which would make it worthy of its divine task? Would she be able to keep her vision in all the wearying, harassing details of the daily struggle — so many days, so many years? Whence would come her help?

The room was silent for a long time.

Then the baby sighed, turned away his head from the breast and fell asleep. His mother kissed his fuzzy little head reverently and lifted him into his crib. Her face was shining. She had been praying.

They were not, however, by any means always occupied with lofty visions, those half-hours of the baby's meals, those seven daily periods of intense immobility of body. Not infrequently they were accompanied by that spasmodic activity of mind

known as fretting. It was always then, chained to her chair as she was, that she remembered the things she ought to have done and had neglected. Indeed wherever she sat down, there were plenty, of such things staring her in the face — ^not to speak of the

myriad others out of sight in the refrigerator, full of odds and ends of food which needed care; in the closets, full of haggard toilettes with hooks off and buttons missing; and in the bureau drawers full of undarned stockings and ribbonless lingerie.

That day, the hour for the baby's nursing, arriving as it always did with appalling unexpectedness, she had caught him to her, at her desk where she sat trying to answer some of the piled-up letters there. The hungry baby began to feed with gross haste, gurgling and swilling down his milk like a little pig, his fat hands pommelling her breast. As she sat thus, submitting to his demands, conscious that her belt was askew, and her finger-nails a disgrace, her tired eyes narrowed to a frown as they roamed around the room. The plants in her window-box were drooping with thirst. The dust on the piano, her sacred piano, was like a furry gray coat, and other dust lay in rolls under the couch. And that Ghirlandajo Visitation — Heavens! Would she never remember to straighten that picture! She had noticed how crookedly it hung, the first day she had been brought downstairs after the baby came, the Sunday when the baby's father had carried her down in his arms. Yes, she had noticed it then, six weeks ago, and she had been so harried and distracted ever since that she had not had time to straighten it. And that was the way everything went ! An ugly vertical line of tension stood between her knotted brows. She looked very plain, and ten years older than she was.

She glanced down at the baby. The sharp edge of his hunger being now slightly dulled, he was nursing more quietly, with regular, business-like tugs, his eyes half -shut with voluptuous enjoyment, his tiny, rose-pink fingers opening and shutting with a gesture of supreme satisfaction. His hand aimlessly wandering about in the air served the purpose of safety valve to ecstasy as do the whiskings of a nursing lamb's tail. As she looked, this wandering little hand encountered

the rose-pink button that was his nose, and helplessly responsive to every external stimulant, closed about it firmly. This cut off his breathing and, forcing him to breathe through his mouth, made him draw away from the breast and gasp. He did not like this at all, and looked accusingly at his mother as he slowly returned to his interrupted meal. His mother smiled dimly to see that, not knowing that he had either a hand or a nose, he blamed her for the interruption. '

As his loud, regular gulps began again, the little pink hand began again its accompanying aimless wanderings, and encountering once more the same softly rounded knob, once more closed about it tightly. The baby was outraged at this second attack upon his liberties, and frowning fiercely, made a determined stand, clinging tightly to the breast, turning red and stubbornly continuing to take into his mouth great gulps of milk which he was quite unable to swallow. His mother began to shake with laughter to see him. Her mirth shook him off from the breast again. He fell back scowling, and emitting a gush of warm white milk, and glowered with the heavy-jowled severity of a hanging-judge at his mother's sparkling face of April laughter.

She wiped his milky mouth and her mirthful eyes, and drew him again to her — " But if he does that again, I shall die, I know I shall die ! " she murmured to herself, reverting to the vernacular of her school days.

As the baby settled down seriously again to his life-work, the corners of her mouth twitched with light-hearted malice to see the little hand, opening and shutting, begin its aimless wanderings. The two former experiences had worn a tiny brain-channel in the baby-mind — the little hand groped about almost purposefully for that soft knob, and encountering it finally, clutched it with spasmodic energy. All the baby's latent, manly self-assertion and dignity sprang to life. No, this was too much ! He would resist to the death this insidious, this treacherous foe who sought to deprive him of his darling dinner! His determination to resist, tightening all his body to active tension, tightened also the hold of his little fist.

Enthroned upon her lofty pinnacle of adult omnis-

ciences, his mother looked down upon this epitome of his misguided race, and knew a moment of Olympian hilarity.

The baby turned red, he turned purple, he writhed upon his mother's knee, but all the more firmly he shut his jaws together upon the breast, his fist upon his nose. And he met defeat with a Promethean outcry at Fate, dropping back from the breast with an agonized howl of rage, his pointed red tongue quivering in the toothless cavern of his mouth.

His mother did not spring with sympathetic haste to console him. No, quite callously, she let him cry. The room rang to his yells, and to laughter, cloudless, blessedly foolish laughter. All alone in the disordered, dusty house, she laughed as she had not laughed since she was a little child herself.

Her eyes were bright, her face flushed — she looked ten years younger than she was. She had again quite forgotten to straighten the Ghirlandajo Visitation.

One day Beauty entered the baby's life. She came as she often does, an unexpected herald of delight, treading softly a new path, all her own. In the baby's case she reached him through the medium of a thermometer — an ordinary wood-and-glass thermometer.

His scientific mother had hung this instrument from the canopy of his little crib. She did this so that it might register the temperature of the exact spot inhabited by the baby, and she consulted its readings anxiously at least every half-hour all day long, in a vain attempt to keep the temperature somewhere near what The Book commanded.

Around the bulb of the thermometer was a little strip of nickel-plated metal, bent as a guard to protect the glass. As it hung near the baby's head, a beam of light from the discreetly shaded window struck on this brightly polished metal. With considerable difficulty the baby's eyes focused themselves on the glittering spot of light. At first one of them turned in alarmingly and made him hideously cross-eyed but after an instant he got it under control and stared steadily at the new object.

It was most agreeable, bright enough to be vivid, yet not so bright as to dazzle. But as he had never before tried to focus his eyes on anything smaller than the window or the ceiling of the room, the effort soon tired him, and he fell suddenly into one of his long, trance-like sleeps. However, he had taken a great step forward. He was never after this quite the same.

The thermometer continued to hang there, and the beam of light to strike on it, and the baby's eyes to find it with more and more frequency. After much practice he made such enormous strides in the conquest of the world and of himself that he could locate it out of his head, and turn his eyes in the right direction to look for it. And he learned to focus his eyes for infinite periods of time, sometimes as long as three minutes by the clock.

The human instinct for self-expression stirred. Here was something which was neither food nor warmth — and yet lovely. He felt an impulse to signify his approval of it. Curiously enough, this impulse prompted him to raise the corners of his mouth, to lift his eyebrows and to wrinkle up his eyes. And when very fleetingly he performed this manoeuvre, he had smiled.

He was so pleased with himself that he at once did it several times in succession. Between those exercises his face fell back suddenly into its usual ponderous fat solemnity, but while they lasted, the transformation into Falstaffian joviality was miraculous. His mother, who had no intimation of this new accomplishment, would not have recognized him.

From that time on, if awake when he was laid back in his bed after a meal, his small new scrap of memory rose up through the rawness of mere sensation, his eyes sought out the lovely thing which dwelt with him, and one of his inimitably jocund smiles saluted it. This never happened until his mother had withdrawn and he had been lying for several moments in the hushed quiet of his own domain. After the assault upon his nerves made by the prodigious and bustling wonders of his room, of his bath, of the excitements of being handled, dressed, and undressed, it took him some time to recover his mental equilibrium and to

attune his tiny soul to the still small radiance of his lodestar.

She had lifted him out of his bath, and he now lay on her lap, wriggling and twisting with satisfaction in the warm room, all his chubby rotundities bare to her view. She looked down on him in astonishment. Where had he come from, this amorphous scrap of human flesh? What place had he in the existence she and her beloved had planned? They had planned a life together, she and that other human soul who filled her heart so that she had room for nothing else. They had planned a life built around their sacred need for each other. It was to be orderly, coherent, full of intellectual pursuits, of worthy ambitions, of achieved refinements, full, above all, of their love. . . .

And, because she and her lover were man and woman, there had come to them from nowhere, this stranger in their lives, this Third One who for always and always would stand between them, break the divine isolation of their union. Always and always he would be there, never again could they know the old freedom, the old . . .

The baby, rejoicing in the freedom of his nakedness, kicked out lustily, waving his hands and feet. His cushion-like foot struck sharply against his mother's hand. She looked down at him again, looked at him as though she had been wakened from a dream. Her brooding eyes flamed. She caught him to her in a passion, a fury. She buried her face in his soft, fragrant flesh ; she kissed him, long and sensuous kisses like a lover's — she kissed his cheeks, his eyes, his knees, his feet . . .

Flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone — ^how dear he was, — how terribly, piercingly dear !

One of the new difficulties which had arrived with the baby was the difficulty about help. Before that event, the baby's mother had been one who thanked Providence that she was not as other women who have trouble with their cooks. Ever since the return from the honey-moon, her kitchen had been occupied by a well-paid Swede who masterfully prepared all the meals and kept the pretty, small house shining from cellar to garret. She had been seconded by an uncon-

sidered charwoman, a drabbled, lean-armed drudge, who came two days a week to wash and to do heavy cleaning.

The young mistress of the house took considerable credit to herself for this smooth running machinery. She said with an air of mature experience that there was no difficulty in keeping good help if you treated them well ; and she lavished upon the competent Swede so many tokens of gratitude for her competence that she was convinced herself that the Swede had a warm personal attachment to her. Although she probably would not have recognized the laundress if she had met her on the street, she took conscientious pains to be kind to her also, sending down by the cook what old clothes were no longer of use, and at Christmas time presenting her, through the same medium, with a five-dollar bill.

But when the baby came, trailing with him the customary clouds of extra washing, extra food, fussy nurses, irregular hours, and soiled linen, the competent Swede promptly took herself off, knowing well that there are plenty of places without babies, where one's competence meets with due rewards. Since then a succession of incompetents had sagged in and out of the kitchen, all complaining, not unreasonably, of the confusion and extra work a baby makes. The baby's mother was too busy with him really to grapple with the problem and for the time being the household ran on spasmodically, on its own impetus, aided by an occasional push from the lean arms of the charwoman, who continued with unconsidered fidelity to arrive at the basement door, and if she was needed, to wipe her water-sodden hands on her dingy apron and ascend the basement stairs to the upper region hitherto reserved for more presentable help. It chanced to be while she was in the room, making up a bed, that the baby's mother became involved in a painful perplexity which threatened to become alarming. Something was the matter with the baby, and she did not know what it was ! He was sleepy, obviously, for he frequently yawned, that inimitable, startlingly human yawn of the tiny baby, and he was evidently trying to rub his eyes with his small fist, although for the most part the fumbling little hands went anywhere but in his eyes. And yet he did not go to sleep. Instead, he fretted in a faint, dull voice which struck terror to

his mother's heart. A sentence from The Book rang ominously in her ears, " It is not the loud vigorous cry of anger or hunger which need alarm the mother, but the low moan of weakness." She felt of him anxiously to see if he had a fever, she felt of him to see if his legs were drawn up, which the Book said was a sign of colic. She swallowed hard, putting out of her mind such horrible words as infantile paralysis, and spinal meningitis, as she hung over the little bed with clasped hands and anxious face.

The scrubwoman, observing this pantomime, said something; but as she was putting a clean pillow-case on a pillow, which she held tightly between her teeth, her remark was quite unintelligible. The baby's mother turned glazed eyes towards her and said impatiently, " Did you speak ? " She had forgotten the other woman was in the room. Frequently indeed, she did not see the dingy figure at all, as the scrubwoman moved about at her tasks.

The older woman came over to the little bed and looked down at the fretful, moaning baby, " Why don't you turn him over, so he lays on the other side ? " she said.

Willing, in her distress, to try even the most inadequate suggestion, the baby's mother lifted the inert little form and shifted its position. The fretful wails stopped, the baby's face calmed into utter peace, every weary muscle relaxed, he drew a long breath of relief and fell instantly into a profound sleep.

The scrubwoman went back to her work. She said casually, " They do get awful sick of lay in' on one side all the time, and when they're as little as that, they can't turn themselves, no more'n a batch of dough can."

The baby's mother sat down on a chair and considered with a new respect the drab shadow to which she had never before given a moment's conscious attention. After a time she asked wonderingly, " How did you know what was the matter with him ? Have you had a Baby, too? "

The scrubwoman gathered up a handful of soiled

towels. "Seven," she said, "three dead and four living." She crossed the room with the ungraceful, heavy gait of women who have worked far beyond their strength.

The younger woman heard a roaring in her ears. Those six words echoed and re-echoed in the silence about, her. What unimaginable heights — what unimaginable depths they signified! She looked with awe at the woman who quite simply had laid such a priceless burnt-offering upon the altar of life . . . and then she turned her eyes to herself.

For a year, for more than a year, there had labored under her roof, a sister, an older sister — and she had never seen her until this hour.

When the scrubwoman went away that evening, her young employer did not give her a bundle of old clothing. She did not even give her a five-dollar bill. She took the worn, sodden, knotty fingers in hers and gave them the handshake of a comrade.

One day, as she was washing out his little flannels, that modern devil, self-questioning introspection, swooped down on her with wide-spreading bat-wings of gloom. An appalling theory about herself flashed into her mind as a possibility, and was instantly installed as a hideous fact.

She had noted several times that she was so busy over the baby that she did not seem constantly to feel that overflowing rush of maternal fondness of which she had so often read. Could it be that she was not a natural mother? Yes, it must be that.

She was too modern, too highly cultured, all the old primal instincts were smothered under her great accumulation of knowledge (yes, she had this thought, and did not smile), she grudged the time the care of the baby took from her study of art and literature, from social life and self-beautification and all civilized pursuits. She did not really love her baby!

She remembered that even in her youth the hardening process had begun. She had had no sympathy with mothers, with babies. In her heart — as a girl — she had never cared for babies. And now she did not

really love her own.

She crossed the room to hang up the little garments and glanced automatically under the canopy of the baby's crib. His face was relaxed in a supreme abandon to unconsciousness. How soundly he did sleep ... it was almost unearthly. It seemed to her that she had never before really observed how profound is a baby's slumber . . . but did they, as a matter of fact, always sleep with so utter a . . . was that the reflection from the white counterpane, or did he look very white, like a little frozen flower . . . as he might look if he were . . .

A splintering horror crashed down through all her body. Her mouth went dry as ashes. It had never before occurred to her, no, not even once, that her baby might . . . she shuddered away from the word. Other women's babies might, but not hers . . . !

From across the room she stared fiercely at the little countenance, relaxed in that divine and terrible peace. No human face ever looked like that unless . . .

But if it were so, what would she have to live for . . . having known what it was to have him, what would be left for her if her baby were taken away? Nothing ! nothing ! nothing ! She flung herself against a locked door.

'But he should not ... no, no, he should not. She would not let him go ! She would clasp him so tightly that no power, not even the great Enemy, could reach him through the circle of her arms. And even as she defied the Enemy's grin figure, she knew him to be invincible, and her heart sickened . . .

The baby, dreaming that he was at his mother's breast, flung out one arm with a sturdy, vigorous gesture and began to suck noiselessly, drawing in imaginary milk.

Across the room a woman with a stricken face gasped and dropped into a chair. The reaction was so violent that for an instant she suffered an acute physical nausea. Then, as she felt her heart begin to beat again, there burst upon her, from some unexpected reservoir of sanity in her nature, a great sweeping

flood of laughter.

She laughed as she never had laughed before in all her life, for it was the first time that she had ever known the exhilaration of laughing at herself ! With all her might and main she was laughing at herself, and the tonic waters of that flood penetrated to many an arid, pretentious spot in her heart, and wrenched her loose from many a constricting mooring of owl-like self-consciousness . . .

She had known the tragic terror which purges the heart and the bright cleansing laughter which heals it. All this in an interval of washing baby flannels!

The day of the great event arrived, all unknown to the baby and his mother. It happened to be also the day on which the baby attained the great age of two months, but nothing marked it from other days save, toward night, an unusual struggle on his mother's part to get him to go to sleep. The fact was that he was now getting old enough to stay awake for an appreciable time, but his mother had already begun the usual maternal habit of thinking of him as a stationary product, several degrees younger than he actually was. Moreover, as it happened, he chanced to feel like lying awake at a most inconvenient time : the exact hour in the late afternoon when she hoped to have him safely asleep, while she prepared supper against the homecoming of his tired and long-suffering father. How she longed to have the time to prepare and serve a really savory and unhurried meal again, such as they had not enjoyed since the entrance into the house of the new guest ! So she exhausted herself in an effort to induce the baby to go to sleep when he did not feel sleepy.

For all her modern scientific theories, she had, for putting him to sleep, hit upon several devices of honorable and ancient descent. Not for the world would she have laid him in a brain-addling, old-fashioned cradle and rocked him. But his crib stood on a slightly uneven place in the floor, and she had discovered that, by shaking one corner of it, a joggling motion was produced which was very pleasing to the baby's somewhat exacting taste. Joggling a crib is quite a different thing from rocking a cradle!

On this occasion, however, she juggled the crib till her back ached, without producing the fervently watched-for slow lowering of the " fringed curtains of his eyes." No indeed ! He stared about him with the bright, vacuous gaze characteristic of his age, vastly enjoying the motion of his crib. His mother looked at the clock in a fever of impatience. She would even now have scarcely time to prepare that toothsome salad she had planned. And she had determined to have something really appetizing for supper that night.

In these days she had come quite humbly to expect little from life for herself, but she still rebelled because she could no longer minister to the small tastes and fancies of the baby's father. He was fond of that salad! If she could only snatch the time to make it for him! That one small achievement she had set her heart upon. It was little enough to ask of fate. But the baby would not go to sleep !

He seemed to be perfectly quiet and well, however.

Why not leave him, rush to the kitchen, and . . . but by this time the baby had quickly acquired a taste for the rhythmical motion of his bed. Before his mother had reached the bottom of the stairs he had worked himself into such a shrill passion of resentment at the cessation of the agreeable sensation that she rushed back, certain that some accident had befallen him. He lay, kicking, waving his arms about, and screaming with an energy terrifying to witness.

His mother set him up in bed and patted him on the back. The baby, much interested in this athletic exercise, stopped crying and contemplated vacancy. His mother laid him down with a haste in which there was some exasperation. A piercing shriek resulted. She leaned over him, juggling the crib again and saying in a soothing tone, " There, there, there." The baby stopped crying, and gave himself up to luxurious enjoyment.

His mother looked at the inexorably advancing hands of the clock. She knew that he was being naughty for the first time in his life, and she remembered perfectly well that The Book recommended that any infant acting in this manner should be sternly left to cry it out. After a half-hour of futile dealing with

her son, she went so far in obeying the precept of The Book as to leave him alone in the room and shut the door.

But she hovered in the hall outside, one agitated ear

laid to the crack of the door, and becoming genuinely frightened at the agonizing quality of his outcries, hastily re-entered the nursery, and, hurrying to the bed, picked up the sobbing, quivering, self-pitying little mass of egotism and laid his tear-wet cheek against her own.

If any benighted member of the older generation had been there to impress and instruct by the calm rigor of her application of correct principles, she might have been stiffened to a more thoroughgoing resistance ; but the house was entirely empty. There was no audience to stimulate her in this battle of wills, and hers suddenly failed her. She had never been in the least noted for a self-sacrificing character, but her well-developed egotism was as nothing before the splendidly youthful zest of the baby for getting what he wanted.

She sank down on the bed, laying his little, musky-smelling bald head on the pillow close to hers, and clasping him to her. The baby's maniacal paroxysm of crying had been a healthfully invigorating bit of exercise for him, and now, feeling a delicious fatigue, he gave a long sigh, relaxed comfortably, flung one tiny arm upon his mother's neck and went to sleep.

His mother felt the most foolish pleasure at this sign of his fondness for being near her, although she made an effort at arid common sense and said to herself, " Of course it's simply the warmth of my body. He would do the same thing if I should get him a hot-water bottle! " But she did not believe this in the least.

She lay quite still, not daring to stir for fear of waking him. Her muscles relaxed involuntarily at the contact with his inert little body, warm and heavy on her arm. For the moment she had forgotten about her plans for supper. She was really very tired after her day of activity. How soft his round little cheek felt against hers. . . .

At a cry from the baby she woke. The room was in twilight. How long could she have slept? It was time for the baby's next meal, and before that would be over his father would be back from the office . . . and no supper prepared! Probably the kitchen fire was out, too. She must at least start that . . .

But the baby screamed and screamed. He was wet and cold and hungry. As usual, before anything else, his wants must be satisfied. How tired she was ! Her short sleep had betrayed her into a weak relaxation without really refreshing her. . . .

As she sat, a few moments later, holding the heavy baby to her breast, she drooped forward wearily in her chair, her back aching, her head throbbing, her spirit utterly cowed in that black depression known to nursing mothers, partly physical, the result of feeding two lives from one source, and partly spiritual.

She was, she felt it drearily, an entire failure in life. She was a failure as a housekeeper . . . she looked about the room, dimly lighted by a lamp with a smoky chimney ; as an individual, she knew her hair to be untidy ; as a wife . . . she remembered with an instant's fury of disappointment the supper she had planned ; as a mother . . . she looked down at the baby, who, minute atom of humanity as he was, had pitted his strength against hers, and won. Her eyelids began to sting. . . .

The baby was enjoying his meal with even more than his usual gusto. In a moment's pause he looked up steadily into his mother's face, which by this time was quite familiar to him. It was even agreeable, too, as the inevitable concomitant of food and warmth and care; though of course it was not beautiful like the thermometer.

That is, it was not usually beautiful. But to-day he observed something new about it. It was richly ornamented with glistening jewels, resplendent in the light of the lamp. They shone, rainbow-like ; they gave out a lovely iridescence. The baby observed them with delight, and the muscles of his face, practised and adept by this time in his great accomplishment, responded.

Suddenly the fat round face underwent the miraculous transformation. The heavily hanging cheeks drew upward in lines of inimitable jollity, the eyes brightened into shining wells of mirth, the eyebrows arched, the little nose crinkled drolly, the rose-red mouth expanded into a wide, silent laugh. Nothing in

all nature, except a burst of sunshine through clouds, could be compared to the radiance of the baby's face, as he lay laughing at his mother's tears.

The door opened quietly and a youngish man with tired eyes stepped in. Before him was an untidy room, a windowbox of drooping, unwatered plants, a lamp with a smoky chimney, and a picture hanging very much askew.

He saw none of these things. He saw only a woman holding a baby in her arms, the light of the lamp glowing like a halo through her loosened hair ; and as he looked his eyes were no longer tired. For though there were tears on the woman's cheeks, her face shone with startled rapture. She looked up and cried in a voice vibrant with incredulous joy, " Oh, oh . . . the baby has just smiled at me! He has smiled! "



THE COUNT AND THE WEDDING GUEST

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Trimmed Lamp*, by O. Henry

One evening when Andy Donovan went to dinner at his Second Avenue boarding-house, Mrs. Scott introduced him to a new boarder, a young lady, Miss Conway. Miss Conway was small and unobtrusive. She wore a plain, snuffy-brown dress, and bestowed her interest, which seemed languid, upon her plate. She lifted her diffident eyelids and shot one perspicuous, judicial glance at Mr. Donovan, politely murmured his name, and returned to her mutton. Mr. Donovan bowed with the grace and beaming smile that were rapidly winning for him social, business and political advancement, and erased the snuffy-brown one from the tablets of his consideration.

Two weeks later Andy was sitting on the front steps enjoying his

cigar. There was a soft rustle behind and above him, and Andy turned his head--and had his head turned.

Just coming out the door was Miss Conway. She wore a night-black dress of _crêpe de_--_crêpe de_--oh, this thin black goods. Her hat was black, and from it drooped and fluttered an ebon veil, filmy as a spider's web. She stood on the top step and drew on black silk gloves. Not a speck of white or a spot of color about her dress anywhere. Her rich golden hair was drawn, with scarcely a ripple, into a shining, smooth knot low on her neck. Her face was plain rather than pretty, but it was now illuminated and made almost beautiful by her large gray eyes that gazed above the houses across the street into the sky with an expression of the most appealing sadness and melancholy.

Gather the idea, girls--all black, you know, with the preference for _crêpe de_--oh, _crêpe de Chine_--that's it. All black, and that sad, faraway look, and the hair shining under the black veil (you have to be a blonde, of course), and try to look as if, although your young life had been blighted just as it was about to give a hop-skip-and-a-jump over the threshold of life, a walk in the park might do you good, and be sure to happen out the door at the right moment, and--oh, it'll fetch 'em every time. But it's fierce, now, how cynical I am, ain't it?--to talk about mourning costumes this way.

Mr. Donovan suddenly reinscribed Miss Conway upon the tablets of his consideration. He threw away the remaining inch-and-a-quarter of his cigar, that would have been good for eight minutes yet, and quickly shifted his center of gravity to his low cut patent leathers.

"It's a fine, clear evening, Miss Conway," he said; and if the Weather Bureau could have heard the confident emphasis of his tones it would have hoisted the square white signal, and nailed it to the mast.

"To them that has the heart to enjoy it, it is, Mr. Donovan," said Miss Conway, with a sigh.

Mr. Donovan, in his heart, cursed fair weather. Heartless weather! It should hail and blow and snow to be consonant with the mood of Miss Conway.

"I hope none of your relatives--I hope you haven't sustained a loss?" ventured Mr. Donovan.

"Death has claimed," said Miss Conway, hesitating--"not a relative, but one who--but I will not intrude my grief upon you, Mr. Donovan."

"Intrude?" protested Mr. Donovan. "Why, say, Miss Conway, I'd be delighted, that is, I'd be sorry--I mean I'm sure nobody could sympathize with you truer than I would."

Miss Conway smiled a little smile. And oh, it was sadder than her expression in repose.

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and they give you the laugh," she quoted. "I have learned that, Mr. Donovan. I have no friends or acquaintances in this city. But you have been kind to me. I appreciate it highly."

He had passed her the pepper twice at the table.

"It's tough to be alone in New York--that's a cinch," said Mr. Donovan. "But, say--whenever this little old town does loosen up and get friendly it goes the limit. Say you took a little stroll in the park, Miss Conway--don't you think it might chase away some of your mullygrubs? And if you'd allow me--"

"Thanks, Mr. Donovan. I'd be pleased to accept of your escort if you think the company of one whose heart is filled with gloom could be anyways agreeable to you."

Through the open gates of the iron-railed, old, downtown park, where the elect once took the air, they strolled, and found a quiet bench.

There is this difference between the grief of youth and that of old age: youth's burden is lightened by as much of it as another shares; old age may give and give, but the sorrow remains the same.

"He was my fiance," confided Miss Conway, at the end of an hour. "We were going to be married next spring. I don't want you to think that I am stringing you, Mr. Donovan, but he was a real Count. He had an estate and a castle in Italy. Count Fernando Mazzini was his name. I never saw the beat of him for elegance. Papa objected, of course, and once we eloped, but papa overtook us, and took us back. I thought sure papa and Fernando would fight a duel. Papa has a livery business--in P'kipsee, you know."

"Finally, papa came 'round, all right, and said we might be married next spring. Fernando showed him proofs of his title and wealth, and then went over to Italy to get the castle fixed up for us. Papa's very proud, and when Fernando wanted to give me several thousand dollars for my trousseau he called him down something awful. He wouldn't even let me take a ring or any presents from him. And when Fernando sailed I came to the city and got a position as cashier in

a candy store."

"Three days ago I got a letter from Italy, forwarded from P'kipsee, saying that Fernando had been killed in a gondola accident."

"That is why I am in mourning. My heart, Mr. Donovan, will remain forever in his grave. I guess I am poor company, Mr. Donovan, but I cannot take any interest in no one. I should not care to keep you from gayety and your friends who can smile and entertain you. Perhaps you would prefer to walk back to the house?"

Now, girls, if you want to observe a young man hustle out after a pick and shovel, just tell him that your heart is in some other fellow's grave. Young men are grave-robbers by nature. Ask any widow. Something must be done to restore that missing organ to weeping angels in _crêpe de Chine_. Dead men certainly get the worst of it from all sides.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Mr. Donovan, gently. "No, we won't walk back to the house just yet. And don't say you haven't no friends in this city, Miss Conway. I'm awful sorry, and I want you to believe I'm your friend, and that I'm awful sorry."

"I've got his picture here in my locket," said Miss Conway, after wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. "I never showed it to anybody; but I will to you, Mr. Donovan, because I believe you to be a true friend."

Mr. Donovan gazed long and with much interest at the photograph in the locket that Miss Conway opened for him. The face of Count Mazzini was one to command interest. It was a smooth, intelligent, bright, almost a handsome face--the face of a strong, cheerful man who might well be a leader among his fellows.

"I have a larger one, framed, in my room," said Miss Conway. "When we return I will show you that. They are all I have to remind me of Fernando. But he ever will be present in my heart, that's a sure thing."

A subtle task confronted Mr. Donovan,--that of supplanting the unfortunate Count in the heart of Miss Conway. This his admiration for her determined him to do. But the magnitude of the undertaking did not seem to weigh upon his spirits. The sympathetic but cheerful friend was the rôle he essayed; and he played it so successfully that the next half-hour found them conversing pensively across two plates of ice-cream, though yet there was no diminution of the sadness in Miss Conway's large gray eyes.

Before they parted in the hall that evening she ran upstairs and brought down the framed photograph wrapped lovingly in a white silk scarf. Mr. Donovan surveyed it with inscrutable eyes.

"He gave me this the night he left for Italy," said Miss Conway. "I had the one for the locket made from this."

"A fine-looking man," said Mr. Donovan, heartily. "How would it suit you, Miss Conway, to give me the pleasure of your company to Coney next Sunday afternoon?"

A month later they announced their engagement to Mrs. Scott and the other boarders. Miss Conway continued to wear black.

A week after the announcement the two sat on the same bench in the downtown park, while the fluttering leaves of the trees made a dim kinetoscopic picture of them in the moonlight. But Donovan had worn a look of abstracted gloom all day. He was so silent to-night that love's lips could not keep back any longer the questions that love's heart propounded.

"What's the matter, Andy, you are so solemn and grouchy to-night?"

"Nothing, Maggie."

"I know better. Can't I tell? You never acted this way before. What is it?"

"It's nothing much, Maggie."

"Yes it is; and I want to know. I'll bet it's some other girl you are thinking about. All right. Why don't you go get her if you want her? Take your arm away, if you please."

"I'll tell you then," said Andy, wisely, "but I guess you won't understand it exactly. You've heard of Mike Sullivan, haven't you? 'Big Mike' Sullivan, everybody calls him."

"No, I haven't," said Maggie. "And I don't want to, if he makes you act like this. Who is he?"

"He's the biggest man in New York," said Andy, almost reverently. "He can about do anything he wants to with Tammany or any other old thing in the political line. He's a mile high and as broad as East River. You say anything against Big Mike, and you'll have a million men on your collarbone in about two seconds. Why, he made a visit over to the old country awhile back, and the kings took to their holes like rabbits."

"Well, Big Mike's a friend of mine. I ain't more than deuce-high in the district as far as influence goes, but Mike's as good a friend to a little man, or a poor man as he is to a big one. I met him to-day on the Bowery, and what do you think he does? Comes up and shakes hands. 'Andy,' says he, 'I've been keeping cases on you. You've been putting in some good licks over on your side of the street, and I'm proud of you. What'll you take to drink?' He takes a cigar, and I take a highball. I told him I was going to get married in two weeks. 'Andy,' says he, 'send me an invitation, so I'll keep in mind of it, and I'll come to the wedding.' That's what Big Mike says to me; and he always does what he says.

"You don't understand it, Maggie, but I'd have one of my hands cut off to have Big Mike Sullivan at our wedding. It would be the proudest day of my life. When he goes to a man's wedding, there's a guy being married that's made for life. Now, that's why I'm maybe looking sore to-night."

"Why don't you invite him, then, if he's so much to the mustard?" said Maggie, lightly.

"There's a reason why I can't," said Andy, sadly. "There's a reason why he mustn't be there. Don't ask me what it is, for I can't tell you."

"Oh, I don't care," said Maggie. "It's something about politics, of course. But it's no reason why you can't smile at me."

"Maggie," said Andy, presently, "do you think as much of me as you did of your--as you did of the Count Mazzini?"

He waited a long time, but Maggie did not reply. And then, suddenly she leaned against his shoulder and began to cry--to cry and shake with sobs, holding his arm tightly, and wetting the _crêpe de Chine_ with tears.

"There, there, there!" soothed Andy, putting aside his own trouble. "And what is it, now?"

"Andy," sobbed Maggie. "I've lied to you, and you'll never marry me, or love me any more. But I feel that I've got to tell. Andy, there never was so much as the little finger of a count. I never had a beau in my life. But all the other girls had; and they talked about 'em; and that seemed to make the fellows like 'em more. And, Andy, I look swell in black--you know I do. So I went out to a photograph store and bought that picture, and had a little one made for my locket, and made up all that story about the Count, and about his

being killed, so I could wear black. And nobody can love a liar, and you'll shake me, Andy, and I'll die for shame. Oh, there never was anybody I liked but you--and that's all."

But instead of being pushed away, she found Andy's arm folding her closer. She looked up and saw his face cleared and smiling.

"Could you--could you forgive me, Andy?"

"Sure," said Andy. "It's all right about that. Back to the cemetery for the Count. You've straightened everything out, Maggie. I was in hopes you would before the wedding-day. Bully girl!"

"Andy," said Maggie, with a somewhat shy smile, after she had been thoroughly assured of forgiveness, "did you believe all that story about the Count?"

"Well, not to any large extent," said Andy, reaching for his cigar case, "because it's Big Mike Sullivan's picture you've got in that locket of yours."



LEGEND OF THE NEWSPAPER

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Violets and Other Tales*, by Alice Ruth Moore

Poets sing and fables tell us,
Or old folk lore whispers low,
Of the origin of all things,
Of the spring from whence they came,
Kalevala, old and hoary,
Æneid, Iliad, Æsop, too,
All are filled with strange quaint legends,
All replete with ancient tales,--

How love came, and how old earth,
Freed from chaos, grew for us,
To a green and wondrous spheroid,
To a home for things alive;
How fierce fire and iron cold,
How the snow and how the frost,--
All these things the old rhymes ring,

All these things the old tales tell.

Yet they ne'er sang of the beginning,
Of that great unbreathing angel,
Of that soul without a haven,
Of that gracious Lady Bountiful,
Yet they ne'er told how it came here;
Ne'er said why we read it daily,
Nor did they even let us guess why
We were left to tell the tale.

Came one day into the wood-land,
Muckintosh, the great and mighty,
Muckintosh, the famous thinker,
He whose brain was all his weapons,
As against his rival's soarings,
High unto the vaulted heavens,
Low adown the swarded earth,
Rolled he round his gaze all steely,
And his voice like music prayed:
"Oh, Creator, wondrous Spirit,
Thou who hast for us descended
In the guise of knowledge mighty,
And our brains with truth o'er-flooded;
In the greatness of thy wisdom,
Knowest not our limitations?
Wondrous thoughts have we, thy servants,
Wondrous things we see each day,
Yet we cannot tell our brethren,
Yet we cannot let them know,
Of our doings and our happenings,
Should they parted be from us?
Help us, oh, Thou Wise Creator,
From the fulness of thy wisdom,
Show us how to spread our knowledge,
And disseminate our actions,
Such as we find worthy, truly."

Quick the answer came from heaven;
Muckintosh, the famous thinker,
Muckintosh, the great and mighty,
Felt a trembling, felt a quaking,
Saw the earth about him open,
Saw the iron from the mountains
Form a quaint and queer machine,
Saw the lead from out the lead mines
Roll into small lettered forms,
Saw the fibres from the flax-plant,

Spread into great sheets of paper,
Saw the ink galls from the green trees
Crushed upon the leaden forms;
Muckintosh, the famous thinker,
Muckintosh, the great and mighty,
Felt a trembling, felt a quaking,
Saw the earth about him open,
Saw the flame and sulphur smoking,
Came the printer's little devil,
Far from distant lands the printer,
Man of unions, man of cuss-words,
From the depths of sooty blackness;
Came the towel of the printer;
Many things that Muckintosh saw,--
Galleys, type, and leads and rules,
Presses, press-men, quoins and spaces,
Quads and caps and lower cases.

But to Muckintosh bewildered,
All this passed as in a dream,
Till within his nervous hand,
Hand with joy and fear a-quaking,
Muckintosh, the great and mighty,
Muckintosh, the famous thinker,
Held the first of our newspapers.



THE MARSEILLAISE

The Project Gutenberg eBook of *When the King Loses His Head and Other Stories*, by Leonid Andreyev

He was a nonentity: the spirit of a rabbit and the shameless patience of a beast of burden. When fate, with malicious mockery, had cast him into our somber ranks, we laughed with insane merriment. What ridiculous, absurd mistakes will happen! But he--he, of course, wept. Never in my life have I seen a man who could shed so many tears, and these tears seemed to flow so readily--from the eyes, from the nose, from the mouth, every bit like a water-soaked sponge compressed by a fist. And even in our ranks have I seen weeping men, but their tears were like a consuming flame from which savage beasts flee in terror. These manly tears aged the countenance and rejuvenated the eyes: like lava disgorged from the inflamed bowels of the earth they burned

ineradicable traces and buried beneath their flow world upon world of trivial cravings and of petty cares. But he, when he wept, showed only a flushed nose, and a damp handkerchief. He doubtless later dried this handkerchief on a line, for otherwise where could he have procured so many?

And all through the days of his exile he made pilgrimages to the officials, to all the officials that counted, and even to such as he endowed with fancied authority. He bowed, he wept, he swore that he was innocent, he implored them to pity his youth, he promised on his oath never to open his mouth again excepting in prayer and praise. And they laughed at him even as we, and they called him "poor luckless little piggy" and yelled at him:

"Hey there, piggy!"

And he obediently responded to their call; he thought every time that he would hear a summons to return to his home, but they were only mocking him. They knew, even as we that he was innocent, but with his sufferings they meant to intimidate other "piggies," as though they were not sufficiently cowardly.

He used to come among us impelled by the animal terror of solitude, but stem and shut were our lips and in vain he sought the key. In confusion he called us dear comrades and friends, but we shook our heads and said:

"Look out! Someone might hear you!"

And he would permit himself to throw a glance at the door--the little pig that he was. Was it possible to remain serious? And we laughed, with voices that had long been strangers to laughter, while he, encouraged and comforted, sat down near us and spoke, weeping about his dear little books that were left on his table, about his mamma and his brothers, of whom he could not tell whether they were still living or had died with terror and anguish.

In the end we would drive him away.

When the hunger strike had started he was seized with terror, an inexpressibly comical terror. He was very fond of food, poor little piggy, and he was very much afraid of his dear comrades, and he was very much afraid of the authorities. Distractedly he wandered in our midst, and frequently wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and it was hard to tell whether the moisture was perspiration or tears.

And irresolutely he asked me:

"Will you starve a long time?"

"Yes, a long time," I answered sternly.

"And on the sly, will you not eat something?"

"Our mammas will send us cookies," I assented seriously. He looked at me suspiciously, shook his head and departed with a sigh.

The next day he declared, green with fear like a parrot:

"Dear comrades, I, too, will starve with you."

And we replied in unison:

"Starve alone."

And he starved. We did not believe it, even as you would not; we all thought that he was eating something on the sly, and even so thought the jailers. And when towards the end of the hunger strike he fell ill with starvation typhus, we only shrugged our shoulders: "Poor little piggy!" But one of us, he who never laughed, sullenly said:

"He is our comrade! Let us go to him."

He was delirious. And pitiful even as all of his life was this disconnected delirium. He spoke of his beloved books, of his mamma and of his brothers; he asked for cookies, icy cold, tasty cookies, and he swore that he was innocent and pleaded for pardon. And he called for his country, he called for dear France. Cursed be the weak heart of man, he tore our hearts into shreds by this call: dear France.

We were all in the ward as he was breathing his last. Consciousness returned to him before the moment of death. He was lying still, frail and feeble as he was; and still were we too, his comrades, standing by his side. And we, every one of us, heard him say:

"When I die, sing over me the Marseillaise!"

"What are you saying?" we exclaimed shuddering with joy and with gathering frenzy.

"When I die, sing over me the Marseillaise!"

And for the first time it happened that his eyes were dry and we wept; we wept, every one of us, and our tears glowed like the consuming fire before which savage beasts flee in terror.

He died, and we sang over him the Marseillaise. With voices young and

mighty we sang the great hymn of freedom, and the ocean chanted a stem accompaniment, upon the crest of his mighty waves bearing back to dear France the pallor of dread and the bloody crimson of hope. And forever he became our guerdon--that nonentity with the body of a rabbit and of a beast of burden and with the great spirit of Man. On your knees before a hero, comrades and friends!

We were singing. Down upon us gazed the barrels of rifles; ominously clicked their triggers; menacingly stretched the points of bayonets towards our hearts--and ever more loudly, ever more joyously rang out the stern hymn, while in the tender hands of fighters gently rocked the black coffin.

We were singing the Marseillaise.



THE FOSTER-CHILD OF THE DEER

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Zuñi Folk Tales*, by Frank Hamilton Cushing

Once, long, long ago, at Háwikuh, there lived a maiden most beautiful. In her earlier years her father, who was a great priest, had devoted her to sacred things, and therefore he kept her always in the house secure from the gaze of all men, and thus she grew.

She was so beautiful that when the Sun looked down along one of the straight beams of his own light, if one of those beams chanced to pass through a chink in the roof, the sky-hole, or the windows of the upper part of the maiden's room, he beheld her and wondered at her rare beauty, unable to compare it with anything he saw in his great journeys round about the worlds. Thus, as the maiden grew apace and became a young woman, the Sun loved her exceedingly, and as time went on he became so enamored of her that he descended to earth and entered on one of his own beams of light into her apartment, so that suddenly, while she was sitting one noon-day weaving pretty baskets, there stood before her a glorious youth, gloriously dressed. It was the Sun-father. He looked upon her gently and lovingly; she looked upon him not fearfully: and so it came about that she loved him and he loved her, and he won her to be his wife. And many were the days in which he visited her and dwelt with her for a space at noon-time; but as she was alone mostly, or as she kept sitting weaving her trays when any one of the family entered her apartment, no one suspected this.

Now, as she knew that she had been devoted to sacred things, and that if she explained how it was that she was a mother she would not be believed, she was greatly exercised in mind and heart. She therefore decided that when her child was born she would put it away from her.

When the time came, the child one night was born. She carefully wrapped the little baby boy in some soft cotton-wool, and in the middle of the night stole out softly over the roof-tops, and, silently descending, laid the child on the sheltered side of a heap of refuse near the little stream that flows by Háwikuh, in the valley below. Then, mourning as a mother will mourn for her offspring, she returned to her room and lay herself down, poor thing, to rest.

As daylight was breaking in the east, and the hills and the valleys were coming forth one after another from the shadows of night, a Deer with her two little brightly-speckled fawns descended from the hills to the south across the valley, with ears and eyes alert, and stopped at the stream to drink. While drinking they were startled by an infant's cry, and, looking up, they saw dust and cotton-wool and other things flying about in the air, almost as if a little whirlwind were blowing on the site of the refuse-heap where the child had been laid. It was the child, who, waking and finding itself alone, hungry, and cold, was crying and throwing its little hands about.

"Bless my delight!" cried the Deer to her fawns. "I have this day found a waif, a child, and though it be human it shall be mine; for, see, my children, I love you so much that surely I could love another."

Thereupon she approached the little infant, and breathed her warm breath upon it and caressed it until it became quiet, and then after wrapping about it the cotton-wool, she gently lifted it on her broad horns, and, turning, carried it steadily away toward the south, followed on either side by her children, who kept crying out "Neh! neh!" in their delight.

The home of this old Deer and her little ones, where all her children had been born for years, was south of Háwikuh, in the valley that turns off among the ledges of rocks near the little spring called Póshaan. There, in the shelter of a clump of piñon and cedar trees, was a soft and warm retreat, winter and summer, and this was the lair of the Deer and her young.

The Deer was no less delighted than surprised next morning to find that the infant had grown apace, for she had suckled it with her own milk, and that before the declining of the sun it was already creeping about. And greater was her surprise and delight, as day succeeded day, to find that the child grew even more swiftly than grow the children of the Deer. Behold! on the evening of the fourth day it was running about and

playing with its foster brother and sister. Nor was it slow of foot, even as compared with those little Deer. Behold! yet greater cause for wonder, on the eighth day it was a youth fair to look upon--looking upon itself and seeing that it had no clothing, and wondering why it was not clothed, like its brother and sister, in soft warm hair with pretty spots upon it.

As time went on, this little foster-child of the Deer (it must always be remembered that it was the offspring of the Sun-father himself), in playing with his brother and sister, and in his runnings about, grew wondrously strong, and even swifter of foot than the Deer themselves, and learned the language of the Deer and all their ways.

When he had become perfected in all that a Deer should know, the Deer-mother led him forth into the wilds and made him acquainted with the great herd to which she belonged. They were exceedingly happy with this addition to their number; much they loved him, and so sagacious was the youth that he soon became the leader of the Deer of the Háwikuh country.

When these Deer and the Antelopes were out on the mesas ranging to and fro, there at their head ran the swift youth. The soles of his feet became as hard as the hoofs of the Deer, the skin of his person strong and dark, the hair of his head long and waving and as soft as the hair on the sides of the Deer themselves.

It chanced one morning, late that summer, that the uncle of the maiden who had cast away her child went out hunting, and he took his way southward past Póshaan, the lair of the Deer-mother and her foster-child. As he traversed the borders of the great mesas that lie beyond, he saw a vast herd of Deer gathered, as people gather in council. They were quiet and seemed to be listening intently to some one in their midst. The hunter stole along carefully on hands and knees, twisting himself among the bushes until he came nearer; and what was his wonder when he beheld, in the midst of the Deer, a splendid youth, broad of shoulder, tall and strong of limb, sitting nude and graceful on the ground, and the old Deer and the young seemed to be paying attention to what he was saying. The hunter rubbed his eyes and looked again; and again he looked, shading his eyes with his hands. Then he elevated himself to peer yet more closely, and the sharp eyes of the youth discovered him. With a shout he lifted himself to his feet and sped away like the wind, followed by the whole herd, their hoofs thundering, and soon they were all out of sight.

The hunter dropped his bow and stood there musing; then picking it up, he turned himself about and ran toward Háwikuh as fast as he could. When he arrived he related to the father of the girl what he had seen. The old priest summoned his hunters and warriors and bade the uncle repeat

the story. Many there were who said: "You have seen an apparition, and of evil omen to your family, alas! alas!"

"No," said he, "I looked, and again I looked, and yet again, and again, and I avow to you that what I saw was as plain and as mortal as the Deer themselves."

Convinced at last, the council decided to form a grand hunt, and word was given from the house-tops that on the fourth day from that day a hunt should be undertaken--that the southern mesa should be surrounded, and that the people should gather in from all sides and encompass the herd there, in order that this wonderful youth should not escape being seen, or possibly captured.

Now, when the Deer had gone to a safe distance they slackened their pace and called to their leader not to fear. And the old foster-mother of the youth for the first time related to him, as she had related to them long ago, that he was the child of mortals, telling how she had found him.

The youth sat with his head bowed, thinking of these things. Then he raised his head proudly, and said: "What though I be the child of mortals, they have not loved me: they have cast me from their midst, therefore will I be faithful to thee alone."

But the old Deer-mother said to him: "Hush, my child! Thou art but a mortal, and though thou might'st live on the roots of the trees and the bushes and plants that mature in autumn, yet surely in the winter time thou could'st not live, for my supply of milk will be withholden, and the fruits and the nuts will all be gone."

And the older members of that large herd gathered round and repeated what she had been saying. And they said: "We are aware that we shall be hunted now, as is the invariable custom when our herd has been discovered, on the fourth day from the day on which we were first seen. Amongst the people who come there will be, no doubt, those who will seek you; and you must not endeavor to escape. Even we ourselves are accustomed to give up our lives to the brave hunters among this people, for many of them are sacred of thought, sacred of heart, and make due sacrifices unto us, that our lives in other form may be spared unceasingly."

A splendid Deer rose from the midst of the herd, and, coming forward, laid his cheek on the cheek of the boy, and said: "Yet we love you, but we must now part from you. And, in order that you may be like unto other mortals, only exceeding them, accompany me to the Land of the Souls of Men, where sit in council the Gods of the Sacred Dance and Drama, the Gods of the Spirit World."

To all this the youth, being convinced, agreed. And on that same day the Deer who had spoken set forward, the swift youth running by his side, toward the Lake of the Dead. On and on they sped, and as night was falling they came to the borders of that lake, and the lights were shining over its middle and the Gardens of the Sacred Dance. And the old Drama-woman and the old Drama-man were walking on its shores, back and forth, calling across to each other.

As the Deer neared the shore of the lake, he turned and said to his companion: "Step in boldly with me. Ladders of rushes will rise to receive you, and down underneath the waters into the great Halls of the Dead and of the Sacred Dance we will be borne gently and swiftly."

Then they stepped into the lake. Brighter and lighter it grew. Great ladders of rushes and flags lifted themselves from the water, and upon them the Deer and his companion were borne downward into halls of splendor, lighted by many lights and fires. And in the largest chamber the gods were sitting in council silently. Páutiwa, the Sun-priest of the Sacred Drama (_Kâkâ_), Shúlawitsi (the God of Fire), with his torch of ever-living flame, and many others were there; and when the strangers arrived they greeted and were greeted, and were given a place in the light of the central fire. And in through the doors of the west and the north and the east and the south filed long rows of sacred dancers, those who had passed through the Lake of the Dead, clad in cotton mantles, white as the daylight, finely embroidered, decked with many a treasure shell and turquoise stone. These performed their sacred rites, to the delight of the gods and the wonder of the Deer and his foster-brother.

And when the dancers had retired, Páutiwa, the Sun-priest of the Sacred Dance, arose, and said: "What would'st thou?"--though he knew full well beforehand. "What would'st thou, oh, Deer of the forest mesas, with thy companion, thy foster-brother; for not thinking of nothing would one visit the home of the _Kâkâ_."

Then the Deer lifted his head and told his story.

"It is well," said the gods.

"Appear, my faithful one," said Páutiwa to Shúlawitsi. And Shúlawitsi appeared and waved his flame around the youth, so that he became convinced of his mortal origin and of his dependence upon food prepared by fire. Then the gods who speak the speech of men gathered around and breathed upon the youth, and touched to his lips moisture from their own mouths, and touched the portals of his ears with oil from their own ears, and thus was the youth made acquainted with both the speech and the understanding of the speech of mortal man. Then the gods called out, and there were brought before them fine garments of white cotton

embroidered in many colors, rare necklaces of sacred shell with many turquoises and coral-like stones and shells strung in their midst, and all that the most beautifully clad of our ancients could have glorified their appearance with. Such things they brought forth, and, making them into a bundle, laid them at the feet of the youth. Then they said: "Oh, youth, oh, brother and father, since thou art the child of the Sun, who is the father of us all, go forth with thy foster-brother to thy last meeting-place with him and with his people; and when on the day after the morrow hunters shall gather from around thy country, some of ye, oh, Deer," said he, turning to the Deer, "yield thyself up that ye may die as must thy kind ever continue to die, for the sake of this thy brother."

"I will lead them," simply replied the Deer. "Thanks."

And Páutiwa continued: "Here full soon wilt thou be gathered in our midst, or with the winds and the mists of the air at night-time wilt sport, ever-living. Go ye forth, then, carrying this bundle, and, as ye best know how, prepare this our father and child for his reception among men. And, O son and father," continued the priest-god, turning to the youth, "Fear not! Happy wilt thou be in the days to come, and treasured among men. Hence thy birth. Return with the Deer and do as thou art told to do. Thy uncle, leading his priest-youths, will be foremost in the hunt. He will pursue thee and thy foster-mother. Lead him far away; and when thou hast so led him, cease running and turn and wait, and peacefully go home whither he guides thee."

The sounds of the Sacred Dance came in from the outer apartments, and the youth and the Deer, taking their bundle, departed. More quickly than they had come they sped away; and on the morning when the hunters of Háwikuh were setting forth, the Deer gathered themselves in a vast herd on the southern mesa, and they circled about the youth and instructed him how to unloose the bundle he had brought. Then closer and closer came the Deer to the youth and bade him stand in his nakedness, and they ran swiftly about him, breathing fierce, moist breaths until hot steam enveloped him and bathed him from head to foot, so that he was purified, and his skin was softened, and his hair hung down in a smooth yet waving mass at the back of his head. Then the youth put on the costume, one article after another, he having seen them worn by the Gods of the Sacred Dance, and by the dancers; and into his hair at the back, under the band which he placed round his temples, he thrust the glowing feathers of the macaw which had been given him. Then, seeing that there was still one article left,--a little string of conical shells,--he asked what that was for; and the Deer told him to tie it about his knee.

The Deer gathered around him once more, and the old chief said: "Who among ye are willing to die?" And, as if it were a festive occasion to which they were going, many a fine Deer bounded forth, striving for the

place of those who were to die, until a large number were gathered, fearless and ready. Then the Deer began to move.

Soon there was an alarm. In the north and the west and the south and the east there was cause for alarm. And the Deer began to scatter, and then to assemble and scatter again. At last the hunters with drawn bows came running in, and soon their arrows were flying in the midst of those who were devoted, and Deer after Deer fell, pierced to the heart or other vital part.

At last but few were left,--amongst them the kind old Deer-mother and her two children; and, taking the lead, the glorious youth, although encumbered by his new dress, sped forth with them. They ran and ran, the fleetest of the tribe of Háwikuh pursuing them; but all save the uncle and his brave sons were soon left far behind. The youth's foster-brother was soon slain, and the youth, growing angry, turned about; then bethinking himself of the words of the gods, he sped away again. So his foster-sister, too, was killed; but he kept on, his old mother alone running behind him. At last the uncle and his sons overtook the old mother, and they merely caught her and turned her away, saying: "Faithful to the last she has been to this youth." Then they renewed the chase for the youth; and he at last, pretending weariness, faced about and stood like a stag at bay. As soon as they approached, he dropped his arms and lowered his head. Then he said: "Oh, my uncle" (for the gods had told who would find him)--"Oh, my uncle, what wouldst thou? Thou hast killed my brothers and sisters; what wouldst thou with me?"

The old man stopped and gazed at the youth in wonder and admiration of his fine appearance and beautiful apparel. Then he said: "Why dost thou call me uncle?"

"Because, verily," replied the youth, "thou art my uncle, and thy niece, my maiden-mother, gave birth to me and cast me away upon a dust-heap; and then my noble Deer found me and nourished me and cherished me."

The uncle and his sons gazed still with wonder. Then they thought they saw in the youth's clear eyes and his soft, oval face a likeness to the mother, and they said: "Verily, this which he says is true." Then they turned about and took him by the hands gently and led him toward Háwikuh, while one of them sped forward to test the truth of his utterances.

When the messenger arrived at Háwikuh he took his way straight to the house of the priest, and told him what he had heard. The priest in anger summoned the maiden.

"Oh, my child," said he, "hast thou done this thing which we are told thou hast done?" And he related what he had been told.

"Nay, no such thing have I done," said she.

"Yea, but thou hast, oh, unnatural mother! And who was the father?" demanded the old priest with great severity.

Then the maiden, thinking of her Sun-lover, bowed her head in her lap and rocked herself to and fro, and cried sorely. And then she said: "Yea, it is true; so true that I feared thy wrath, oh, my father! I feared thy shame, oh, my mother! and what could I do?" Then she told of her lover, the Sun,--with tears she told it, and she cried out: "Bring back my child that I may nurse him and love but him alone, and see him the father of children!"

By this time the hunters arrived, some bringing game, but others bringing in their midst this wondrous youth, on whom each man and maiden in Háwikuh gazed with delight and admiration.

They took him to the home of his priest-grandfather; and as though he knew the way he entered the apartment of his mother, and she, rising and opening wide her arms, threw herself on his breast and cried and cried. And he laid his hand on her head, and said: "Oh, mother, weep not, for I have come to thee, and I will cherish thee."

So was the foster-child of the Deer restored to his mother and his people.

Wondrously wise in the ways of the Deer and their language was he--so much so that, seeing them, he understood them. This youth made little ado of hunting, for he knew that he could pay those rites and attentions to the Deer that were most acceptable, and made them glad of death at the hand of the hunter. And ere long, so great was his knowledge and success, and his preciousness in the eyes of the Master of Life, that by his will and his arm alone the tribe of Háwikuh was fed and was clad in buckskins.

A rare and beautiful maiden he married, and most happy was he with her.

It was his custom to go forth early in the morning, when the Deer came down to drink or stretch themselves and walk abroad and crop the grass; and, taking his bow and quiver of arrows, he would go to a distant mesa, and, calling the Deer around him, and following them as swiftly as they ran, he would strike them down in great numbers, and, returning, say to his people: "Go and bring in my game, giving me only parts of what I have slain and taking the rest yourselves."

So you can readily see how he and his people became the greatest people of Háwikuh. Nor is it marvellous that the sorcerers of that tribe should

have grown envious of his prosperity, and sought to diminish it in many ways, wherein they failed.

At last one night the Master of Sorcerers in secret places raised his voice and cried: “_Weh-h-h-h! Weh-h-h-h-h-h!_” And round about him presently gathered all the sorcerers of the place, and they entered into a deep cavern, large and lighted by green, glowing fires, and there, staring at each other, they devised means to destroy this splendid youth, the child of the Sun.

One of their number stood forth and said: “I will destroy him in his own vocation. He is a hunter, and the Coyote loves well to follow the hunter.” His words were received with acclamation, and the youth who had offered himself sped forth in the night to prepare, by incantation and with his infernal appliances, a disguise for himself.

On the next morning, when the youth went forth to hunt, an old Coyote sneaked behind him after he reached the mesas, and, following stealthily, waited his throwing down of the Deer; and when the youth had called and killed a number of Deer and sat down to rest on a fallen tree, the Coyote sneaked into sight. The youth, looking at him, merely thought: “He seeks the blood of my slain Deer,” and he went on with his prayers and sacrifices to the dead of the Deer. But soon, stiffening his limbs, the Coyote swiftly scudded across the open, and, with a puff from his mouth and nostrils like a sneeze toward the youth, threw himself against him and arose a man,--the same man who had offered his services in the council of the wizards--while the poor youth, falling over, ran away, a human being still in heart and mind, but in form a coyote.

Off to the southward he wandered, his tail dragging in the dust; and growing hungry he had naught to eat; and cold on the sides of the mesas he passed the night, and on the following morning wandered still, until at last, very hungry, he was fain even to nip the blades of grass and eat the berries of the juniper. Thus he became ill and worn; and one night as he was seeking a warm place to lay him down and die, he saw a little red light glowing from the top of a hillock. Toward this light he took his way, and when he came near he saw that it was shining up through the sky-hole of someone’s house. He peered over the edge and saw an old Badger with his grizzly wife, sitting before a fire, not in the form of a badger but in the form of a little man, his badger-skin hanging beside him.

Then the youth said to himself: “I will cast myself down into their house, thus showing them my miserable condition.” And as he tried to step down the ladder, he fell, _teng_, on the floor before them.

The Badgers were disgusted. They grabbed the Coyote, and hauling him up the ladder, threw him into the plain, where, _toonoo_, he fell far away

and swooned from loss of breath. When he recovered his thoughts he again turned toward the glowing sky-hole, and, crawling feebly back, threw himself down into the room again. Again he was thrown out, but this time the Badger said: "It is marvellously strange that this Coyote, the miserable fellow, should insist on coming back, and coming back."

"I have heard," said the little old Badger-woman, "that our glorious beloved youth of Háwikuh was changed some time ago into a Coyote. It may be he. Let us see when he comes again if it be he. For the love of mercy, let us see!"

Ere long the youth again tried to clamber down the ladder, and fell with a thud on the floor before them. A long time he lay there senseless, but at last opened his eyes and looked about. The Badgers eagerly asked if he were the same who had been changed into a Coyote, or condemned to inhabit the form of one. The youth could only move his head in acquiescence.

Then the Badgers hastily gathered an emetic and set it to boil, and when ready they poured the fluid down the throat of the seeming Coyote, and tenderly held him and pitied him. Then they laid him before the fire to warm him. Then the old Badger, looking about in some of his burrows, found a sacred rock crystal, and heating it to glowing heat in the fire, he seared the palms of the youth's hands, the soles of his feet, and the crown of his head, repeating incantations as he performed this last operation, whereupon the skin burst and fell off, and the youth, haggard and lean, lay before them. They nourished him as best they could, and, when well recovered, sent him home to join his people again and render them happy. Clad in his own fine garments, happy of countenance and handsome as before, and, according to his regular custom, bearing a Deer on his back, returned the youth to his people, and there he lived most happily.

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As I have said, this was in the days of the ancients, and it is because this youth lived so long with the Deer and became acquainted with their every way and their every word, and taught all that he knew to his children and to others whom he took into his friendship, that we have today a class of men--the Sacred Hunters of our tribe,--who surpassingly understand the ways and the language of the Deer.

Thus shortens my story.



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